

# The New Lebanon:

## Democratic Reform and State Sponsorship

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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### Brief Analysis

On July 19, Lebanon's incoming prime minister, Fuad Siniora, announced the formation of a new Lebanese cabinet, a move praised in Washington as another step toward democratic reform. At the same time, the State Department warned that it would not be able to maintain contact with newly appointed Minister of Energy and Water Muhammad Fneish, who is a member of Hizballah. Beyond the fact that U.S. officials are prohibited by law from dealing with members of officially designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations like Hizballah, Fneish's appointment raises the larger question of how to deal with the extensive presence of active terrorist groups in a Lebanon no longer dominated by Syria.

### Lebanon and the State Sponsors List

In recognition of the reality that Syria controlled its neighbor's politics, economy, national security, and more, the State Department long refrained from listing Lebanon as a sponsor of terrorism or even taking Beirut to task in its annual terrorism reports. Yet, in the wake of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, adopted in September 2004, Lebanon began to change. The February 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri sparked a grassroots movement advocating independence from Syria and local democratic reform. In subsequent months, disgraced Syrian military forces hastily retreated under international pressure, elections were held throughout the country, and a new, freely elected government appointed a cabinet independent of Lebanon's traditional puppet masters in Damascus.

With privilege comes responsibility, though—Lebanese support for terrorist groups can no longer be excused under the presumption of Syrian control. Nearly every Palestinian terrorist group maintains an official presence in Lebanon, from the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC) to the Islamist Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Many of these groups' leaders and operatives moved to Lebanon from Syria in the wake of international pressure to close their offices in Damascus. Lebanon also hosts al-Qaeda affiliates like Asbat al-Ansar, as well as Kurdish, Armenian, and other terrorist groups. Moreover, the 9-11 Commission noted that al-Qaeda operatives were trained in explosives, security, and intelligence by Hizballah in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley in fall 1993.

## Hizballah's Terrorist Activities in Lebanon

The most prominent terrorist group in Lebanon by far—and the only truly “Lebanese” group—is Hizballah. Resolution 1559 made clear the Security Council's policy on armed groups by calling for the “disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.” Indeed, Hizballah's presence in Lebanon extends beyond the political sphere, as evidenced by its activity on several different levels.

**Training.** Lebanon hosts terrorist training camps where Hizballah and Iranian operatives have schooled Palestinian, Kurdish, Armenian, and other recruits in a variety of terrorist and intelligence tactics. For example, several of the terrorists who carried out the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing were recruited in Syria and trained in Lebanese camps. As of August 2002, Iran was reportedly financing Bekaa camps where Hizballah, Hamas, PIJ, and PFLP-GC terrorists were trained to use rockets (e.g., the short-range Fajr-5 missile, the SA-7 antiaircraft rocket) and to carry out “underwater suicide operations.” The camps, including one in Khuraj near the Syrian border, were reportedly under the command of Iranian general Ali Reza Tamzar, commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps activity in the Bekaa.

**Radicalization.** In December 2004, Hizballah's satellite television channel, al-Manar, was added to the U.S. Terrorism Exclusion List and removed from France's national satellite provider, Eutelsat. The channel was also banned from the Dutch provider New Sky Satellite in March 2005, and from the Spanish provider Hispasat in June. The United States has been a primary target of al-Manar's vitriolic programming, which reaches an estimated 10 to 15 million viewers worldwide daily. In one speech broadcast by the station, Hizballah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah stated, “Our enmity to the Great Satan is complete and unlimited. . . . Our echoing slogan will remain: Death to America!” In addition, al-Manar frequently takes its case for suicide operations straight to the people; potential bombers are implored to focus their attention on the afterlife “instead of getting preoccupied with our lives here on earth.”

**Criminal financing.** Hizballah benefits both financially and operationally from the Bekaa poppy crop, which it trades to Israeli Arabs for intelligence on Israeli infrastructure and troop positions. Israeli authorities have broken up several Israeli Arab cells working for Hizballah in return for money and, often, drugs. Some of those cells, like one operating out of the Galilee village of Abu Snan, were planning to kidnap Israeli soldiers. In September 2002, an Israeli military court indicted a lieutenant colonel in the army, part of a ten-member gang, for spying on behalf of Hizballah. The officer had passed classified information to Hizballah operatives in return for money, hashish, and heroin.

Hizballah runs other criminal enterprises in Lebanon. Several co-opted Western Union offices there reportedly launder and transfer funds for the group, in addition giving it a cut of the 7 percent service charge split between Western Union and the local agent. Hizballah operatives have also looked into the possibility of insurance fraud by taking out Canadian life insurance policies for operatives committing terrorist acts in the Middle East.

**Undermining the peace process.** According to one Palestinian Authority (PA) official, “We know that Hizballah has been trying to recruit suicide bombers in the name of al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades to carry out attacks which would sabotage the truce.” Another official cited intercepted emails and bank transactions indicating that Hizballah officials in Lebanon have increased their payments to terrorists since the ceasefire brokered in February 2005: “Now they are willing to pay \$100,000 for a whole operation whereas in the past they paid \$20,000, then raised it to \$50,000.” As one official put it, “Hizballah and Iran are not happy with [Mahmoud] Abbas's efforts to achieve a ceasefire with Israel and resume negotiations with Israel. That's why we don't rule out the possibility that they might try to kill him if he continues with his policy.” Moreover, the widespread presence in the West Bank and Gaza of terrorist cells managed by Hizballah from Lebanon challenges the PA's ability to control Fatah activists and maintain stability.

Rockets. Iranian cargo planes deliver sophisticated weaponry, from rockets to small arms, in regular flights from Tehran to Damascus. These weapons are then trucked to Hizballah camps in the Bekaa Valley. The Christian Science Monitor reported in February 2002 that “well informed sources” referred to “truck[load] after truckload” of weapons arriving in southern Lebanon between May 2000 and December 2001. Given such an arsenal, Hizballah has long posed an immediate threat to Israel from the north. The group possesses approximately 13,000 rockets, including 11,000 katyushas as well as Fajr rockets with a range of 40 to 110 kilometers (a range that encompasses more than half a million Israelis). It is widely understood that the disarmament called for by Resolution 1559 refers not to the small arms held by individuals throughout Lebanon, but rather to the rockets pointed at Israel.

## Conclusion

The appointment of a Hizballah member as a minister in the new cabinet raises anew the question of Lebanon’s actions regarding terrorism. Lebanese voters can now elect anyone they wish, and the government can fill its cabinet as it sees fit—but these decisions have consequences. Electing or appointing individuals tied to terrorism, guerrilla warfare, or other forms of political violence is beyond the pale of acceptable Western democratic norms, and the West should react accordingly. Resolution 1559 underscored the international consensus behind the centrality of disarming militias as part of the process of democratization. Nevertheless, the Lebanese domestic debate over disarming Hizballah is unlikely to conclude soon, given the diversity of the newly formed cabinet. (Two-thirds of its members are from the former opposition coalition headed by Saad Hariri and Druze leader Walid Jumblat, with the remainder consisting of allies of Emile Lahoud and members of the Shiite bloc.) The international community must continue to push Lebanon to disarm Hizballah in accordance with the UN resolution. As European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana recently stated regarding Hamas’s foray into the political sphere, terrorist groups must transform themselves into political parties in order to be removed from international blacklists, and disarming is the first step in this process. Solana added, “A political party cannot bear arms; this exists in no democracy.”

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