

Hizb Allah's Gambit in Syria

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The war in Syria has exposed the group's true strategic interests, which it has sought to secure through heavy involvement in the fighting.

Speaking in late May 2013, Hizb Allah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah declared that the battle in Syria was Hizb Allah's fight: "We will continue along the road, bear the responsibilities and the sacrifices. This battle is ours, and I promise you victory." To that end, Lebanese Hizb Allah went "all-in" fighting alongside Bashar al-Assad regime loyalists and Iranian revolutionary guardsmen against Syrian rebels. The impact of Hizb Allah's involvement has been significant, as was seen most clearly in the battle for Qusayr in May-June 2013, where Hizb Allah gunmen reportedly fought house to house, suffered losses, and played the decisive role in turning the tide against anti-Assad rebels who ultimately lost the town. That battle also laid bare the myth that Hizb Allah was not fighting in Syria.

This article identifies Hizb Allah's strategic calculus for joining the fight in Syria. First, it contextualizes Hizb Allah's historical connection to the Sayyida Zaynab shrine in Damascus, since it is utilized heavily in Hizb Allah's propaganda. It then probes Hizb Allah's military involvement as well as its training advisory role with new militias. It finds that Hizb Allah is heavily involved in Syria not only to help its patrons in Damascus and Tehran, but also to stave off an existential crisis in Lebanon if the Syrian rebels were to achieve victory...

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