



## Spotlight on Terrorism: Lebanon and Hezbollah December 9 – 16, 2024

### Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ The IDF continued to take action against Hezbollah's attempts to violate the ceasefire, attacking Hezbollah operatives, rocket and missile launchers, and terrorist facilities in south Lebanon. For the first time, the Lebanese army was deployed in towns near the border with Israel to implement the agreement.
- ▶ Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah's secretary general, claimed the organization did not want to violate the ceasefire agreement, despite alleging "hundreds of Israeli violations." He asserted that even if "the resistance" lost sometimes, it remained in place, although with limited capabilities. He also claimed Hezbollah had no intention of disarming north of the Litani River and presented the organization's next steps. Homeowners in the Dahiyeh al-Janoubia whose houses were destroyed began receiving annual rent payments.
- ▶ Criticism of Hezbollah: Lebanese Shi'ites filed lawsuits against the organization for hiding weapons in private homes in south Lebanon. A Druze politician close to Hezbollah called for peace with Israel.
- ▶ Najib Mikati, prime minister of the Lebanese interim government, said at least \$5 billion would be necessary for reconstructing the country. According to reports, it would cost at least \$12 million to clear the rubble from the Dahiyeh al-Janoubia.
- ▶ Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, claimed optimism regarding the election of a new president for Lebanon on January 9, 2025, after more than two years. Hezbollah's candidate, Suleiman Frangieh, is expected to withdraw from the race, while the army commander, Joseph Aoun, leads the list of candidates.

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<sup>1</sup> Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

## Implementing the ceasefire

### IDF activity

► This past week the IDF continued to take action against Hezbollah's attempts to violate the ceasefire which went into effect on November 27, 2024. IDF forces attacked terrorist operatives from the air and destroyed weapons and other terrorist facilities which threatened IDF forces and Israeli territory (IDF spokesperson, December 9 to 16, 2024).



**Weapons located by the IDF (IDF spokesperson, December 13, 2024)**

► The Lebanese ministry of health and media outlets reported two fatalities in IDF strikes (Lebanese ministry of health website and al-Mayadeen, December 9 to 16, 2024). It was also reported that "Israeli occupation forces" fired "warning shots" at Lebanese Army forces and at a unit from the Polish battalion of UNIFIL as they attempted to open the main road between Aitaroun and Bint Jbeil (al-Akhbar; Lebanon 24, December 10, 2024).

### Hezbollah

► On December 14, 2024, Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah's secretary general, delivered a speech on the issue of the ceasefire. He claimed Hezbollah was "exercising patience despite hundreds of Israeli violations" in order to assist in implementing the agreement. He said the Lebanese government should monitor the "violations" and the committee overseeing the agreement should prevent them. He also made it clear that Hezbollah did not intend to disarm north of the Litani River, claiming the agreement applied only to the area south of the Litani, where the Lebanese Army was to be the sole armed force (al-Manar, December 14, 2024).

► Hassan Fadlallah, member of the Lebanese Parliament representing Hezbollah, alleged that the ceasefire agreement had been forged "from a position of strength," and that Hezbollah had not stopped the war "at any cost" but because of "rules" it agreed to accept. He added that Hezbollah had no problem with the Lebanese Army's being the sole security authority south of the Litani River or "anywhere else in Lebanon." He claimed Hezbollah

coordinated with the Lebanese Army to ensure security in Lebanon and noted that security authority belonged to "official forces" (Janoubia, December 15, 2024).

► Wafiq Safa, head of Hezbollah's Liaison and Coordination Unit, met with Joseph Aoun, commander of the Lebanese Army, on December 4, 2024; also present at the meeting was Ahmed Baalbaki, advisor to the Lebanese parliament speaker. The atmosphere at the meeting was reportedly "excellent" and consistent with the ongoing relationship between the Lebanese Army and "the resistance." Safa and Aoun agreed to coordinate closely to implement the ceasefire agreement and UN Security Council Resolution 1701 in south Lebanon (Lebanon 24, December 13, 2024).

## The Lebanese government

► On December 14, 2024, Najib Mikati, prime minister of the Lebanese interim government, met in Rome with Giorgia Meloni, prime minister of Italy, and thanked her for Italy's ongoing support for Lebanon, particularly its support for efforts to achieve a ceasefire. Meloni stated that Italy was committed to Lebanon's peace and security, and that the ceasefire understandings were the beginning of lasting stability (Lebanese prime minister's X account, December 14, 2024).



**Mikati meets with Meloni (Lebanese prime minister's X account, December 14, 2024)**

## The Lebanese army

► On December 11, 2024, the Lebanese Army, in coordination with UNIFIL, deployed at five locations in the towns of al-Khiam and Marjayoun, as part of the first stage of implementing the ceasefire agreement. The army called on civilians not to enter the towns yet, as units were conducting an engineering survey to clear unexploded ordnance (Lebanese Army X account, December 11, 2024).

► Najib Mikati, prime minister of the Lebanese interim government, said the deployment of Lebanese Army forces in al-Khiam and Marjayoun was vital for strengthening the army's

presence in the area. He noted the need for a complete Israeli withdrawal from all areas in Lebanon and for action to stop Israel's "violations" of the agreement, which had "led to several Lebanese casualties" (al-Nashra, December 11, 2024).



**Lebanese army and UNIFIL forces deployed in the al-Khiam region  
(Lebanese army X account, December 11, 2024)**

▶ On December 11, 2024, Joseph Aoun, commander of the Lebanese Army, met in his office with General Michael Kurilla, commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM). They discussed the regional situation in general and the situation in Lebanon in particular, as well as ways to support the army and activities to implement the ceasefire agreement in south Lebanon (Lebanese army X account, December 11, 2024).



**Aoun meets with Kurilla (Lebanese army X account, December 11, 2024)**

▶ On December 9, 2024, the Lebanese Army announced it had received 62 APCs, donated by Jordan. The shipment arrived by ship at the Beirut port and was unloaded in Aoun's presence (Lebanese Army X account, December 9, 2024). The vehicles are American-made M113 APCs (Defense Arabia, December 9, 2024).



**Right: Aoun (center) in front of APCs from Jordan. Left: Some of the APCs donated by Jordan on a pier in Beirut (Lebanese army X account, December 9, 2024)**

▶ On December 12, 2024, Joseph Aoun met with Patrick Gauchat, chairman of UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization). They discussed the regional situation in general and the situation in Lebanon in particular in light of activities to implement the ceasefire agreement (Lebanese News Agency, December 12, 2024).

## Hezbollah

### Speech by Na'im Qassem

▶ On December 14, 2024, Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah's secretary general, delivered a recorded speech in which he addressed the ceasefire, developments in Syria, gave a summary of the fighting against Israel, and related to the future of "the resistance" in Lebanon and Hezbollah's plans following the war (al-Manar, December 14, 2024):

◆ Qassem again defended Hezbollah's decision to open a "support front for the Gaza Strip," calling it a "noble, lofty" act, adding that Hezbollah had fulfilled the duty of every Arab and Muslim. He claimed Hezbollah had anticipated "aggression" against Lebanon but not when it would start, which was in September 2024. He added that despite the painful losses of Hassan Nasrallah and other senior figures, and the damage to the organization's communications network, Israel had failed to break "the resistance," which launched rockets and caused the displacement of more than 200,000 "settlers."

◆ Qassem claimed "the resistance" was legitimate because it helped people reclaim what "rightfully belongs to them." He added that "the resistance" scored points rather than knockouts, noting that sometimes it scored points and sometimes it lost, but it remained on the ground even if its capabilities were limited. He alleged that

"the resistance" protected Lebanon, and without it Israel would have reached Beirut and settled in south Lebanon.

◆ According to Qassem, Hezbollah's plan for moving forward included implementing the agreement south of the Litani River; reconstructing Lebanon with the help of state institutions and cooperation with other countries and organizations; electing a new president for Lebanon on January 9, 2025; participating in social and economic reform and fighting corruption; and holding dialogues on problematic issues, such as how to address the Israeli "occupation," strengthening the Lebanese Army and "defense" strategy.



**Na'im Qassem delivers a speech (al-Manar, December 14, 2024)**

## Hezbollah involvement in the reconstruction

► Hezbollah reportedly began distributing annual rent payments of \$14,000 to all homeowners whose houses were destroyed in the strikes; an estimated 14,500 residential structures and 400 other buildings were destroyed in the Dahiyeh al-Janoubia in Beirut. Hezbollah also began transferring payments to owners of damaged apartments, with payments expected to begin soon to owners of industrial, commercial and tourism establishments; so far \$80 million has been paid out. The Lebanese government has started preparations to clear the rubble in the Dahiyeh al-Janoubia with the participation of official municipal authorities and Hezbollah's Jihad al-Binaa foundation (Lebanon 24, December 14, 2024).



**A check for \$14,000 from Hezbollah's al-Qard al-Hassan Association, issued December 12, 2024 (GothamLebanon, December 14, 2024)**

▶ Hassan Fadlallah, a Hezbollah representative in the Lebanese Parliament, said Hezbollah was focusing on reconstruction and was cooperating with relevant parties to rebuild buildings and infrastructure. He said that efforts had begun to assess damages and compensate those affected, adding that Hezbollah was primarily focusing on repairing damage to the electricity, water and communications networks (Janoubia, December 15, 2024).

## Hezbollah activities after the war

▶ Hassan Fadlallah said that the deaths of Hassan Nasrallah, the organization's secretary general, and Hashem Safi al-Din, his designated successor, showed that "the resistance" would not retreat and could not be defeated, rather, it became stronger each time its leaders were killed. He said "the resistance" would not allow anyone to disarm it, claiming it was not linked to Hezbollah's political party but to the "Lebanese people," and therefore it would "continue to make sacrifices for security" (Janoubia, December 15, 2024).

▶ Qassem Qassir, a writer for the Asas Media news website, noted that Hezbollah's original role was to "defend and build Lebanon," but due to regional circumstances it became involved in other activities, such as fighting alongside Assad regime forces against ISIS. Now, he claimed, Hezbollah had returned to fulfilling its "original role." He also claimed that in light of developments in Syria, Hezbollah currently played a central role in defending Lebanon, because if Syria were to once again become a battlefield, Lebanon could become involved. In such a scenario, the Lebanese Army would not be able to protect the country from Syria while simultaneously "defending" south Lebanon, and therefore Hezbollah would assume the role (OTV, December 9, 2024).

## Criticism of Hezbollah

▶ Since the ceasefire went into effect Lebanese Shi'ites have reportedly filed lawsuits against Hezbollah for hiding missiles and other weapons beneath private homes and among the civilian population, as well as digging tunnels under their homes without their knowledge, thereby making them targets for attacks. The plaintiffs, including residents of south Lebanon, exiles from the south and Lebanese who sent aid, appealed to a court in south Lebanon but their case was dismissed on the grounds that the court lacked the authority to handle such issues. They now plan to file the lawsuits with the public prosecutor (Nidaa al-Watan, December 16, 2024).

▶ Wiam Wahhab, a Lebanese Druze politician who was considered close to Hezbollah, advised Shi'ites to reach a peace agreement with Israel because the Lebanese nation no longer "wanted war" [sic]. According to him, the "resistance axis"<sup>2</sup> ended with the deaths of Qassem Soleimani, the late commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force, and Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general, and no one believed in the "axis" anymore. He said that he was willing to "make a deal with the devil" to protect his tribe (al-Jadeed, December 15, 2024).



**Wiam Wahhab (al-Jadeed, December 15, 2024)**

▶ Sami Gemayel, leader of the Kataeb Party, said that with the fall of the Syrian regime, Lebanon had been freed from all forms of "protection" for the first time in 35 years. He declared, "Hezbollah's protection has ended, Iran's and Syria's protection has ended, and today Lebanon is free, free, free." He added that the first step toward forging a new Lebanon for the coming generations was for all of Hezbollah's weapons to be handed over to the state (Lebanese News Agency, December 9, 2024).

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<sup>2</sup> Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian organizations, the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.



▶ Gebran Bassil, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement in Lebanon, said it was essential for Hezbollah to focus on domestic issues and distance itself from the "resistance axis," instead of getting involved in regional affairs. During a visit to France, Bassil stated that Lebanon needed Hezbollah as a political actor, and called on the organization to commit to political rules and focus on Lebanon's sovereignty. He added that he agreed with the organization regarding defending Lebanon and supporting the Palestinian cause, but noted that such support should be carried out within a political framework and not through military interventions (Lebanon Debate, December 10, 2024).

## Lebanon

### Reconstruction

▶ Najib Mikati, prime minister of the Lebanese interim government, stated that according to World Bank estimates, Lebanon would need at least \$5 billion for its reconstruction. In a speech at the annual political forum of Giorgia Meloni, Italy's prime minister, held in Rome, he said that Israeli "aggression" had increased the suffering of the people and led to significant loss of life, severely damaged the infrastructure, economy and social stability, and had caused a humanitarian crisis by displacing thousands of persons (Lebanese News Agency, December 15, 2024).

▶ The cost of clearing the rubble in the Dahiyeh al-Janoubia has been estimated at \$12 million, but it has been suggested costs would be 30% higher because initial inspections revealed that in some instances foundations had been severely damaged and the buildings would need to be completely demolished. An estimated 400 buildings would need to be rebuilt, compared to 243 buildings after the 2006 war. Reportedly, the Southern Council, responsible for south Lebanon, was expected to conduct a survey of the damage in south Lebanon and Nabatieh, as well as in the western Beqa'a and Rashaya, the areas most severely affected by the war (al-Akhbar, December 10, 2024).

▶ Abbas al-Hajj Hassan, Lebanon's minister of agriculture, met with a representative of the World Food Program (WFP) to discuss the ministry's plans to assess damage to the agricultural sector from Israeli attacks. The parties finalized preparations for implementing the ministry of agriculture's strategy for 2025 to 2030 (Lebanese News Agency, December 10, 2024).

▶ The al-Murtadha Hospital in Ba'albek, which had ceased operations following Israeli strikes, has resumed admitting patients after the completion of renovations (Lebanese News Agency, December 10, 2024).

## Presidential elections

▶ Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, expressed optimism for the prospects of electing a new Lebanese president on January 9, 2025, during the parliamentary session, after the position had been vacant since late October 2022. He said he expected the session to end with "white smoke."<sup>3</sup> He also asserted that anyone who sought to postpone the meeting would bear responsibility before the Lebanese people and the international community, as Lebanon needed a president to implement the ceasefire agreement and UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 13, 2024).

▶ Berri met with the ambassadors of the International Quintet Committee (United States, France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Egypt), which is working to promote political understandings within Lebanon to advance the election of a new president. He invited the ambassadors to the session to be held on January 9, 2025, and stressed the national urgency of electing a president, particularly under the current circumstances and in light of rapid regional developments, especially in Syria (al-Nahar, December 11, 2024).

▶ A "parliamentary source" stated that the ambassadors of the five countries had reexamined their considerations in light of regional developments and were working with Lebanese parliamentary blocs and independents to reach agreements on at least two serious candidates for the presidency if consensus could not be reached on another candidate (al-Anbaa, December 15, 2024).

▶ Suleiman Frangieh, leader of the Marada Movement, who had Hezbollah's backing as a presidential candidate, is expected to withdraw his candidacy. He reportedly informed his allies that he used his candidacy only to ensure his participation in the election of the next president, similar to other political actors. It was further reported that he told Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, that if consensus were not reached on his candidacy, he would support General Joseph Aoun, commander of the Lebanese army, as the next president (al-Nahar, December 15, 2024; Asas Media, December 15, 2024).

▶ According to "Lebanese parliamentary sources," General Aoun remains at the top of the list of candidates for the presidency of Lebanon and that those who thought he was out of the race were mistaken (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 16, 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to the election of a new Pope.