

Lebanese Politicians Want Their Government to Act Against Hezbollah (Part 1)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Lebanese politicians have been up in arms decrying their government's inaction amid tensions with Israel. The story is [here](#).

They are not talking about the government acting against Israel, which has tried its best to dampen tensions with Hezbollah, but against Hezbollah. For it is Hezbollah that threatens to drag the Lebanese into a war with Israel that, in Lebanon, only Hezbollah wants. Recently in an attack on a base in Syria, the Israelis unintentionally killed a Hezbollah operative. The Israelis explained this, but Hezbollah refused to accept that explanation. Instead it launched what turned out to be a thwarted attack in northern Israel. Israel deliberately aimed its fire so as not to kill or wound the

infiltrators, but only to scare them back over the border, another sign of Israel's desire to avoid more hostilities.

The Kataeb Party, which represents the interests of Lebanese Christians, and is opposed to both Hezbollah and Palestinian groups in Lebanon, demanded that "the President of the Republic and the government prove their presence, especially since the supposed response was or will be from Lebanese territory in retaliation for an Israeli operation targeting Iranian and Hezbollah sites in Syria," according to Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA).

The Lebanese government has done nothing to rein in Hezbollah because it is in thrall to the terror group. Several ministers are members of the group, while others, including the Maronite President Michel Aoun, follow the group's dictates.

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Lebanon is now not so much a nation-state but a collection of groups, with Hezbollah the most powerful, dominating all the rest. The Lebanese National Army is afraid of confronting Hezbollah, the proxy of Iran, militarily. Forces around the billionaire Hariri family promote the interests of the Sunnis; the Kataeb Party represents the Maronites and other Christians; the Shi'a political movement Amal, led by the Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, represents those Shi'a who remain outside Hezbollah.

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There is nothing the Lebanese government can do to rein in Hezbollah. It has no say in where the terror group hides, in civilian areas, its huge armory of weapons, including 140,000 missiles which in any future war with the Jewish state, Israel would have to seek out and destroy, inevitably causing tremendous damage to civilian infrastructure.

Lebanese politicians called out Lebanon's Hezbollah-supported government for its relative silence and inaction concerning recent tensions between Israel and Hezbollah.

But what did these politicians expect? The Lebanese government is controlled by Hezbollah. It could not possibly demand of Hezbollah that it tamp down tensions with Israel. Those few ministers in the government who are opposed to Hezbollah are outnumbered, and many are also physically afraid of opposing the group. The government's "silence and inaction" naturally follow.

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There has already been one "response" from Lebanese territory by Hezbollah, an attack that was thwarted by Israel and that Hezbollah chooses to deny ever took place, in order to give it the right to "try again." Meanwhile, the Kataeb Party has taken the lead in demanding that the President "do something" to prevent Hezbollah from attacking Israel again and possibly dragging Lebanon again into a war. President Michel Aoun, however, is unlikely to heed this request. Though he is a Christian. Aoun's political power, and possibly his finances, depend on his loyalty to Hezbollah.

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Lebanon has been “used as a mailbox” where Iran and Israel, and even at times the Gulf Arabs, send “messages” – attacks, reprisals, even refusals to engage in reprisals constitute those “messages” – to one another. Attacks and reprisals between Israel and Iran, through its Hezbollah proxy, have in the past been launched from, or targeted to hit, Lebanese soil. The Kataeb Party wants to take Lebanon entirely out of the Middle East chess board.

The Kataeb party encouraged seriously consider [sic] proposing neutrality in order to allow the state to take back control of decision-making from external powers.

Neutrality would mean no more favoring of Hezbollah; the Lebanese government would signal that it will no longer tolerate Hassan Nasrallah’s state-within-a-state. Instead of Iran continuing to call the shots in Beirut through its Hezbollah proxy, the Beirut government would reassert itself and demand that Hezbollah stop any attacks on Israel from Lebanon, and possibly demand that it disarm. This reassertion would only be possible if the Western countries, especially the United States and France, supply weaponry to the Lebanese National Army sufficient to allow it to stare down Hezbollah in any contest of wills. At the same time, the Gulf Arabs could supply the funds that would allow the Lebanese to climb out of the abyss of financial ruin that Lebanon finds itself in. It might even be that those who, like the Christian President Aoun, have until now made an unseemly marriage of convenience with Hezbollah, will reconsider if Hezbollah weakens, and they may yet become what they never were before –

Lebanese patriots.

Former director of the Lebanese national police and minister of justice Ashraf Rifi stressed that while [Israeli] airstrikes target Syria and Iran, "the response is from Lebanon, the hostage and the victim," according to NNA.

The "response" Rifi refers to is from Hezbollah, that in retaliation for Israeli attacks that kill Hezbollah members in Syria and Iran, launches attacks, like the one it tried to carry out recently when its fighters infiltrated across the border between Lebanon and Israel. They were driven back by Israeli fire that was deliberately aimed by the IDF so as not to hit them, but only to scare them back into Lebanon. Israel has no desire at this point to escalate fighting with Hezbollah; it has too much on its plate. Ashraf Rifi quite rightly worries about Hezbollah's attacks, despite Israel signalling it does not want to escalate hostilities, that could drag Lebanon into another destructive war it does not want, like the one Hezbollah fought with Israel in 2006. Lebanon would not be a participant in such a war, but it would unavoidably be on the receiving end of Israel's bombing campaign, which would attempt to destroy the 140,000 missiles Hezbollah has hidden throughout southern Lebanon and southern Beirut.

"Where is Lebanon's interest? Where is the security of the Lebanese people? Where is Lebanon's protection? Where is the Lebanese opinion?" added Rifi. "The homeland is ours, and we will not remain hostages forever. Enough."

Rifi's questions express the frustration, and anger, of many Lebanese who rightly feel they have lost control of their own country, and are being held hostage to the policies of Hezbollah and Iran. The Lebanese do not know what Iran will order Hezbollah to do next against Israel, nor what kinds of attacks would then provoke the kind of response from Israel

which would lead to a still greater reprisal from Hezbollah, leading to a hot war which Lebanese Christians, Sunnis, and all non-Hezbollah Shi'a, do not want but cannot stop. They remember the destruction in 2006 and know that the next time, given Israel's need to destroy as many of those 140,000 missiles as it can find, now hidden all over southern Lebanon and southern Beirut, the destruction of infrastructure will inevitably be many times greater.

First published in