

Hezbollah Has Accomplished Its Mission in Syria, Preparing to Respond to Israel's War on Lebanon

By [Elijah J. Magnier](#)

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[Elijah J. Magnier](#)

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Hezbollah has accomplished its mission in Syria and its presence on the battlefield is no longer necessary. Thus, in coordination with the Syrian government, Hezbollah has moved the majority of its forces into Lebanon, particularly as the Syrian army has recovered and regained its military strength and increased its combat capability. But with a US establishment that could encourage Israel (even after the failed adventure in 2006) to embark on another strike, the spectre of war looms over the country, and fear remains on the southern front in the Lebanon. What is the risk of this and the real possibilities of its happening?

According to well-informed sources in the Lebanese capital, the Lebanese Hezbollah has accomplished the task of stabilising the Syrian regime and preventing its fall and its replacement with Takfiri ruling groups or even a failed state. Despite the United States, some European states and other Middle Eastern countries (including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey) supporting tens of thousands of Takfiris to travel to Syria with the aim to control the Levant, Hezbollah, the Syrian army, Iran with its allies and with Russia were able to thwart this plan after years of long war and effective intervention against Jihadists.

Thus, Hezbollah withdrew most of its forces from Syria and took up positions in Lebanon where, incidentally, the geopolitical conditions do not bode well: the forecast is not good.

The sources I spoke to are aware that there is no longer a need to maintain large forces in Syria, despite the presence of more than one hundred thousand jihadists in the north of Syria. Moreover, ISIS maintains the control of a geographical area equivalent to the size of Lebanon in the Syrian Badiya (the Steppe), opposite al-Boukmal city on the east side of the Euphrates, and in the province of Hasaka under the protection of the US occupation forces.

In addition, there is a long-lasting danger in Daraa (southern Syria) of the imposition of a buffer zone, because the US and Israel have not yet finished with Syria and have not declared the defeat of their project to divide the country.

However, any reshuffling of the cards to change the military dynamic in the Levant requires a political decision among the main players (US, Turkey, Russia and Iran):

1. Turkey seems to be playing fairly with Russia and Iran, therefore it is holding the proper leverage to "ignite" the jihadists or "extinguish them."
2. The area controlled by ISIS in al Badiya is a desert (within the area of influence of the Syrian army and not the one under US's influence) and is completely

besieged. Plans to attack and eliminate ISIS are ongoing in the Yarmouk camp, al-Hajar al-Aswad, and in a couple of months are expected also to include la-Badiya.

3. In Daraa, no matter how much the US tries, any tactical military plan by Israel or the US can no longer make any difference to the Syrian political-military map or create a danger to the centre of power of the Syrian government in Damascus.

The Syrian army is recording repetitive achievements in rural Idlib, Aleppo and Hama, and in Gouta as well as in the Yarmouk camp and Hajar al-Aswad. It has regained its health and power again by liberating vast territories. No withdrawal or defeat has been registered in the last year of war and it is managing to pile up all jihadists in the north of Syria under Turkish control by the use of military force or political negotiations. Thus, the Syrian army is no longer struggling and fighting for the protection and the existence of the regime, but for the liberation of new territories that add to its achievements and extend its control.

As far as Iran is concerned, its forces are expected to remain as long as the US forces are occupying Syrian soil: that is the wish of the Syrian government. Therefore, the Iranian presence or departure is more complicated than the one of Hezbollah. It is linked to the conflict with the US, the balance with Turkey and the supply of ground forces to the Russian Airforce as long as Russia is involved in the war in Syria.

Hezbollah has pulled in its core fighters and elite forces and is deploying these to positions that the leadership considers sensitive in the unlikely but possible event of an Israeli aggression on Lebanon.

According to informed sources, there are constant Israeli annoyances aimed at provoking Iran and Hezbollah to drag them into a battle of a larger size than the hit-and-run on the Syrian arena. These sources believe that the US mood has given a green light to Israel to engage in war if necessary. The pretext has never been an issue and can be pulled out of a drawer when all parties are ready. In this possible war scenario, the US - so the sources believe - is ready to offer support from aircraft carriers and battleships to participate in an attack against Hezbollah, to build a steel-umbrella over Haifa and Tel Aviv, to hunt down missiles fired at Israel, offer all intelligence information, and share banks of objectives.

The sources say that President Trump seems have made a decision - with the help of Arab country leaders who agreed to fund any military campaign - to rein in Iran in the region and its allies such as Hezbollah. For this purpose, the US has intensified its joint manoeuvres with Israel to simulate any future war scenario with Iran and Hezbollah.

According to the sources, Israel may well take the region into a risky adventure, even though Tel Aviv does not ultimately want to go to war with Hezbollah simply because it knows it cannot achieve the ultimate goal of eliminating Hezbollah's arsenal and military power in Lebanon.

Lebanon's domestic political environment is no longer as favourable as it was in 2006 when pro-Saudi and pro-US **Fouad Sinoura** was a Prime Minister. The actual government and the Presidency are not against Hezbollah and refuse to isolate it. In addition, **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** is not generally considered to be an adventurer who dares to start a long war against Hezbollah that may destroy his political future. Netanyahu seems fond of special operations, security, and provocative blitzkriegs. But Hezbollah cannot rely on this assessment of Netanyahu's background and history, it will not take the risk. It considers that

it is essential to prepare forces on the ground, as war against Israel, though it may never happen, could happen tomorrow.

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