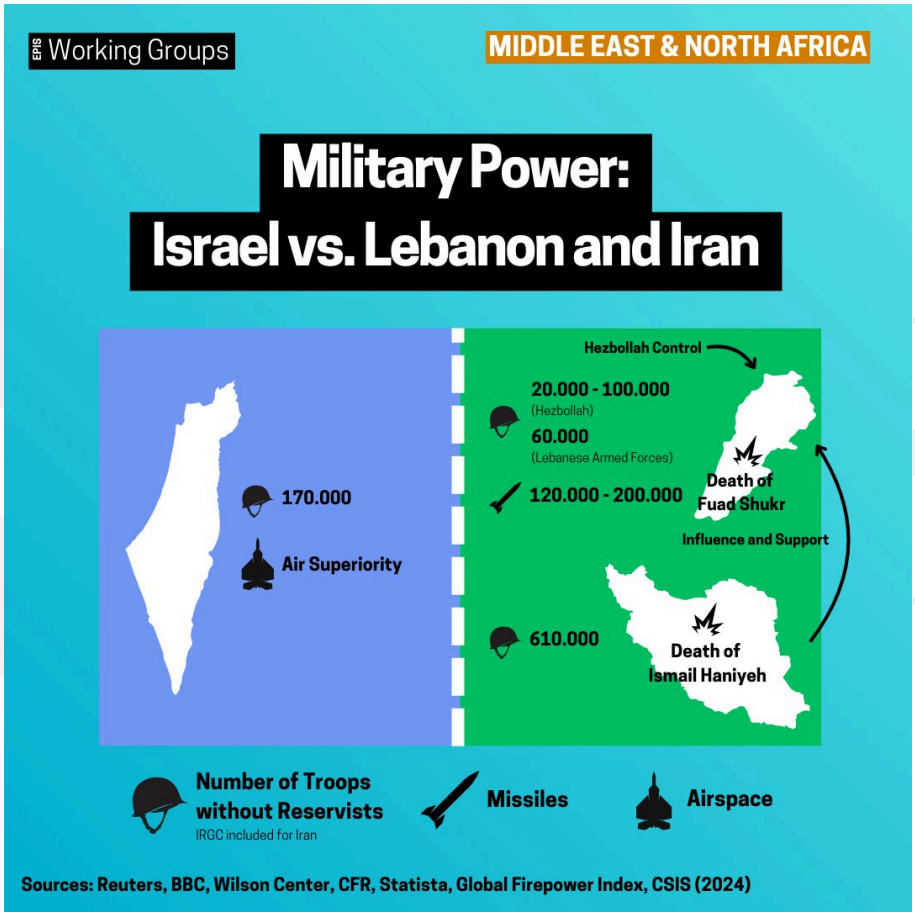
# Hezbollah

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*Disclaimer: This article refers to the status as of August 5th, 2024, and changes to the dynamic situation may have occurred in the period up to its publication. It is intended to provide a basic foundation of understanding, but in view of the size and complexity of the subject, it cannot, of course, claim to be fully comprehensive.*

The trend towards further escalation in the Middle East is reaching alarming dimensions these days; especially after the execution of Fuad Shukr, one of Hezbollah's most important commanders, in Beirut and Ismail Haniyya, who had headed the political bureau of Hamas since 2017 and was staying in a residence in Tehran.

With regard to the question of the probability of a confrontation involving ground troops and its potential outcome, two points in particular need to be considered: The role of the autonomous Hezbollah in the state structure of Lebanon; in other words, the possibilities of the Lebanese government to counteract a further escalation, as well as the extent of military capabilities that the Islamist combat units can make use of.

Lebanon is currently structured conceptually as a parliamentary republic, which would indeed provide mechanisms to ensure stability through regulations on the distribution of parliamentary seats and the highest state positions to certain religious denominations. Hezbollah and its allied parties also lost their majority in the unicameral parliament there in 2022 and are now only represented by 62 out of 128 MPs, 13 of whom belong to Hezbollah itself. Nevertheless, the country has completely lacked domestic political, economic and social stability for years.

On the one hand, Hezbollah benefits from extensive support from Tehran; however, it is also very well connected within the state through its political activities; whereby support for the Shia Muslims in southern Lebanon is a major pillar of its power. In addition, there are numerous economic and social involvements, such as in the health and education sectors, but also in the area of infrastructure. In the territories it controls, it exercises quasi-sovereign authority, and the regular institutions are unable to counter this. Hanin Ghaddar, an expert at the Washington Institute, goes even further and assumes that the Lebanese government is too weak to even influence Hezbollah's decision to enter into more extensive hostilities with Israel. The Lebanese Armed Forces cannot be seen as opponents of Hezbollah either – open cooperation has increased significantly in recent years, not least due to the rising numbers of Shiite officers in the ranks of the Lebanese army.

In terms of Hezbollah's military strength, the picture is mixed. Taken on its own, its military arm cannot be said to have sufficient striking power to match the advanced technology of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) – this is demonstrated in particular by the precision strikes recently carried out against the above-mentioned commanders, which require sophisticated intelligence structures in the background in addition to highly advanced defence technology. Although Hezbollah has been able to expand its air defence capabilities in recent years, Israel's air superiority is currently still out of the question. This could result in significant advantages for a possible ground operation.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah's capabilities far exceed what Hamas was able to deploy against the IDF in the Gaza Strip. It is not without reason that it is viewed as the most powerful non-state actor in the world: In 2021, the leader of the organization spoke of 100,000 combatants; and even the Institute for Strategic Studies estimates a strength of 20,000 active soldiers (not yet taking into account any reservists). Many of them are experienced in warfare and have fought in Syria in recent years, for example. In addi-

tion, the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates that it has between 120,000 and 200,000 missiles and other ballistic weapons at its disposal. These are impressive figures. By way of comparison, Israel's military manpower is also "only" 170,000, taking into account professional soldiers alone. The troop strength of Iran, which equips Hezbollah, must also be considered, which – including the units of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – amounts to about 610,000 men under arms. Although this is of course not a sufficient criterion for the question of military success prospects, it has become clear, particularly in Ukraine, that the number of available units in long-term (especially conventional) conflicts with increasing material attrition is still of major importance in the 21st century. This applies all the more to Hezbollah, as heavy arms – such as tanks, as were obtained in the Syrian civil war – would immediately become the target of the technologically superior enemy.

Finally, the motives for a possible offensive should be critically examined. Israel's leadership seems to justify its risky course by claiming that a confrontation is unavoidable in the foreseeable future anyway. A final eradication of Hezbollah should bring peace to the north. However, it is questionable whether this is true: The terrorist group emerged from the flames of the Lebanon War in 1982, during which Israeli troops advanced into the neighbouring state and remained there even in violation of UN resolution No. 509 – and it was also supposed to be finally fought in 2006. In 2024, however, it is stronger than ever.