

Policy Challenges in the Israel-Hezbollah Conflict: Iranian Influence Unveiled

Summarized

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THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS LAB

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SUMMARY

The Israel-Hezbollah conflict, though now in a ceasefire phase, has been greatly indicative of the ramifications of the Israel-Hamas conflict and its effects on broader ideological and state conflicts in the Middle East ("What we know...", 2024). In response to the October 7th, 2023, Hamas attacks, Hezbollah, an armed group based in Lebanon, joined the fighting in ideological solidarity with Hamas (Center For Preventative Action, "Conflict...", 2024). Hezbollah acted as part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance" consisting of ideologically aligned non-state actors with the combined goal of eliminating Israel ("Who are the Houthis...", 2024). As Iran's strongest member of this proxy system, Hezbollah receives weapons and funding from Iran (CFR.org Editors, 2024). As such, the conflict over the shared border between Israel and Lebanon was a greater indication of Iran and Israel's animosity and the nature of non-state actors in modern warfare.

Since the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, Hezbollah has been acting as a Shiite dissidence group in response to continued Israeli occupation after the end of the war (Wright, 2024). Tensions between Hezbollah and the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) have existed since Hezbollah's inception but have not escalated into conflict since 2006. The October 7th Hamas attacks on Israel prompted Hezbollah to fire artillery and rockets into Israel (Center For Preventative Action, "Conflict...", 2024). This evolved into a consistent exchange of fire between the two sides (Center For Preventative Action, "Israeli...", 2024). The exchange escalated in September of 2024 when an Israeli attack caused Hezbollah pager devices to detonate, killing multiple and wounding thousands (Mallo, et al., 2024). Millions on both sides of the border have been displaced (Khashan, 2024).

This is within the context of Lebanon's worst-ever financial crisis, which has prompted widespread poverty (Center For Preventative Action, "Conflict...", 2024) ("Multidimensional poverty...", 2021). The financial crisis has decreased Lebanon's military capability and ability to provide services ("Lebanon," 2024). Hezbollah has stepped in to act as a placeholder governmental body, giving it significant political and cultural influence in Lebanon. The Lebanese government is in a political vacuum and slow to enact reforms that would reshape the economy, improve political transparency, and prevent corruption, and as a result, human development has suffered (Center For Preventative Action, "Conflict...", 2024).

The current trajectory of the conflict, stemming from a ceasefire deal brokered in November 2024, is following the most likely path predicted for how the conflict was expected to evolve. The deal, formally made by Israel and Lebanon, set in place efforts to remove an armed presence from the area of contention over 60 days. Though violations on both sides have been reported, the ceasefire has largely held ("What we know...", 2024).

The ceasefire has allowed for the opportunity to approach the "best-case" scenario predicted for the conflict. With the ceasefire in place, the Lebanese government may pursue reforms recommended by the International Monetary Fund to regain stability and credibility and heal the wounds of the economic crisis. This would reduce Hezbollah's influence and increase the reach of a free and fair government. Though the current trajectory does not indicate any such drastic reforms, the "worst-case" scenario for the conflict is becoming less likely. The establishment of a ceasefire deal makes the escalation of the conflict less likely to occur. However, within Lebanon, if reforms are not put in place to limit Hezbollah's influence and reduce poverty, human development will still suffer.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samantha Ramay is an undergraduate student in history at Webster University in St. Louis, USA. In the Lab, she has researched and accessed policy scenarios concerning attacks on trade in the Red Sea as well as Iran's conflictual proxy conflicts with Israel. She is also researching the effects of populism on democracy and populist leaders' contributions to democratic backsliding





ABOUT THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS RESEARCH LAB

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The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.

