

Hezbollah 2.0—One Year After Nasrallah’s Elimination

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The elimination of Hassan Nasrallah marked the lowest point in Hezbollah’s history, following a series of blows inflicted by the IDF during the war with Israel and other negative developments from the organization’s perspective, mainly the collapse of the Assad regime, the disintegration of the pro-Iranian Shiite axis, and the establishment of a new Lebanese leadership opposed to Hezbollah’s path. A year later, it appears that while Hezbollah has changed its appearance, it still clings to its extremist ideology. The ceremonies marking the anniversary of Nasrallah’s elimination served as an opportunity for a show of force and were part of the organization’s effort to recover while navigating the challenges it faces—in particular, the demand that it disarm. For Israel, the window of opportunity to alter the security and political reality vis-à-vis Lebanon is rapidly narrowing, and it would be unwise to rely solely on military strikes to prevent Hezbollah’s rehabilitation.

Hezbollah marked the anniversary (September 27) of the elimination of its former Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, with a series of impressive events attended by large crowds at several locations: at the site in the Dahiya quarter where he was killed together with other senior figures in the organization’s military apparatus and the Iranian Quds Force Commander in Lebanon, Abbas Nilforushan; at the grand burial complex along the road to Beirut International Airport; and at the Beirut seafront near the popular Raouché Rock.

In his speech at the main ceremony, which was held at the burial site, Hezbollah’s current Secretary-General, Naim Qassem, declared that despite the pain over Nasrallah’s death, the organization remains committed to continuing, even to the point of death, along the path he charted, and that Hezbollah will be ready to confront anyone attempting to force it to disarm. His words were accompanied by the familiar chants from the crowd: “At your command, Nasrallah!” Media coverage emphasized the glorification of the charismatic and admired Nasrallah and the path of resistance he led. The newspaper *al-Akhbar* even referred to him as the organization’s “eternal” leader. Nasrallah’s status and influence extended far beyond his formal positions within the organization. During his 32 years as secretary-general, he played a decisive role in transforming Hezbollah into a powerful, independent militia threatening Israel and its domestic opponents, while simultaneously entrenching the organization as a central political, social, and economic force within Lebanon. Beyond Lebanon, Nasrallah served as a key pillar of support for Iran and as a central architect in shaping and developing the strategy of the Shiite axis.

Nasrallah’s death, therefore, represents a formative event in Hezbollah’s history, adding to a string of severe blows that forced the organization in November 2024 to agree to a ceasefire with Israel. The devastating Israeli strikes were compounded by regional developments that further worsened Hezbollah’s situation, primarily the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and

the Shiite axis's entanglement in a prolonged war with Israel, which included, for the first time in June 2024, a direct broad military confrontation between Israel and Iran. All these factors left the organization battered and weakened. Hezbollah lost many of its commanders and fighters during the war (in an August 5 speech, Qassem claimed the organization had 5,000 dead and 13,000 wounded). A significant portion of Hezbollah's military assets were destroyed (the IDF claims to have eliminated 80% of Hezbollah's firepower), and its financial capabilities were severely diminished. It has been forced to find alternative methods for smuggling weapons, funds, and drugs after Syria's new regime has sought to block its activities within Syrian territory. Most serious of all, Hezbollah continues to be a daily target of IDF strikes aimed at halting its reconstruction efforts, eliminating operatives, and destroying its military infrastructure—ammunition depots and production facilities.

The absence of Hezbollah's senior, veteran leaders who were killed in the war has also hampered its decision-making process as it stands at a critical crossroads. Its current leader, Naim Qassem, lacks Nasrallah's abilities and authority. Recently, reports have surfaced of internal disagreements among the remaining senior members, mainly between Qassem, who advocates a relatively pragmatic line, and the more hardline faction led by Wafiq Safa, a veteran member of the organization, who has adopted a defiant stance toward both Qassem and Lebanon's official leadership. During the anniversary event held at Raouché Rock, Safa even exceeded his approved permissions by using public areas for Hezbollah's purposes, prompting Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam to demand legal action against him.

Hezbollah, which remains firmly committed to its ideology of resistance and struggle against Israel, is now facing growing domestic threats to its status as an independent militia. These challenges stem from the consolidation of a new Lebanese leadership determined to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty and establish a new political order in the country. The central issue on Hezbollah's agenda is the demand that it disarm, as part of the leadership's attempts to achieve a monopoly over the use of force. This move has become necessary for Lebanon to respond positively to external pressure, mainly from the United States, France, and Saudi Arabia. These states have made their significant assistance for Lebanon's postwar reconstruction and fragile economic recovery conditional on tangible progress in this difficult mission vis-à-vis Hezbollah.

This new leadership demonstrated considerable courage on August 5 when the government made the historic decision to collect weapons from all the militias in Lebanon, including Hezbollah, and to instruct the Lebanese Army to formulate a detailed plan for implementing this measure. Two days later, on August 7, it also adopted the US phased proposal for a settlement with Israel. However, Hezbollah's categorical opposition, coupled with the understanding that the Lebanese Army would find it difficult to carry out such a plan, led to a retreat from the decision on September 5. During discussions on the issue, the Lebanese Army's commander presented a gradual, geographically based disarmament plan without a defined timeline, emphasizing the army's limited resources. In practice, the Lebanese Army operates only to a very limited extent in southern Lebanon, continues to avoid clashes with Hezbollah, and focuses mainly on collecting weapons from Palestinian refugee camps (in this case, only from Fatah elements, pursuant to an agreement reached between Lebanon and Mahmoud Abbas in May 2025).

The issue of disarmament is existential for Hezbollah, which adamantly insists on retaining its weapons—a central pillar of its power against both domestic and external adversaries. On this matter, the organization presents a unified and consistent line, evident in statements by all its representatives and in its media outlets, as well as in Qassem’s speeches. He stresses that Hezbollah will not relinquish its weapons, which he claims are essential for Lebanon’s defense, and will not even discuss disarmament until its demands of Israel are met: the full withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanese territory (from the five border points still held by Israel); cessation of Israeli attacks on Hezbollah; release of all Lebanese prisoners held in Israel; and reconstruction of war-damaged Lebanese villages.

In parallel, a year after the ceasefire took effect, Hezbollah appears to be regaining its footing. It is undergoing reorganization, recruiting new operatives, finding creative methods to smuggle weapons (via sea and air routes, alongside attempts to reopen land smuggling lines through Syria, some of which have been thwarted), and generating new sources of income through its networks in South America, Europe, and Africa. According to sources within the organization, Hezbollah has provided financial aid to its supporters affected by the war amounting to as much as one billion dollars. Moreover, the group continues to enjoy broad popular support in Lebanon, as reflected in the massive turnout for the ceremonies marking the anniversary of Nasrallah’s elimination. It also maintains cooperation with the Shiite Amal movement, led by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who serves as Hezbollah’s main liaison to the Lebanese government, and retains the backing of Iran, whose absolute commitment to Hezbollah remains unchanged despite its own hardships. The Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, attended the memorial events in Beirut.

Nonetheless, the need to focus on reconstruction has led Hezbollah to adopt a relatively pragmatic approach and introduce a series of policy adjustments, including:

Toward the IDF: Abandoning its “deterrence equations” strategy and refraining from retaliating to Israeli attacks, while claiming these are Israeli violations of the ceasefire and hinting that this restraint is temporary.

Toward the Lebanese leadership: Engaging in dialogue, invoking shared responsibility for Lebanon’s fate, and striving to avoid direct confrontation. For instance, Hezbollah and Amal ministers have simply absented themselves from cabinet meetings or votes on decisions that contradict the organization’s interests—citing it as “misunderstandings”—but have not resigned.

Delegating responsibility to the Lebanese government or army to pursue diplomatic channels in addressing Hezbollah’s demands of Israel and in rehabilitating war-damaged villages and residents, while insisting that the reconstruction be state-funded.

Avoiding internal violence: For now, Hezbollah has refrained from armed clashes within Lebanon, limiting itself to organizing protest rallies and motorcycle parades with Hezbollah flags. Its spokesmen assert that the organization’s weapons are intended solely to defend Lebanon’s sovereignty and security against Israel and that it seeks to avoid a descent into civil war.

Responding to disarmament efforts: Hezbollah states it is willing to discuss a joint “defense strategy” with the Lebanese government (without elaborating on its content), but only after its demands of Israel are met and clearly signaling no intent to forfeit its unique status.

Amid harsh Arab criticism of Israel over the Gaza war and the strike in Doha, Hezbollah has tried to form a united front against Israel with moderate Arab actors, mainly Saudi Arabia. However, its public appeal to Riyadh, supported by Iran, was rejected on the grounds that Saudi Arabia engages only with states, not organizations—a stance that drew derisive commentary in the Lebanese media.

The key conclusion for Israel from these developments is that even though the IDF currently holds the upper hand militarily, the window of opportunity that has been created to reshape the security and political realities along the northern border and in Israel–Lebanon relations is narrowing. Despite its difficulties, Hezbollah is managing to recover; the Lebanese government and army remain too weak to confront it; and over time, the IDF will likely find it harder to sustain daily operations against the organization.

Therefore, while Israel should continue its military campaign to weaken Hezbollah and hinder its rehabilitation, it must also pursue, with US support, a parallel diplomatic initiative. This should include steps to strengthen Lebanon’s leadership and army, set realistic expectations for Beirut’s dealings with Hezbollah, and provide Israeli concessions and international assistance that can empower Hezbollah’s opponents within Lebanon. Simultaneously, Israel should intensify the political and economic campaign against Hezbollah, primarily by blocking the organization’s illegal funding channels through cooperation with regional actors harmed by Hezbollah’s smuggling networks (Jordan, Syria, and the Gulf states) and with international actors in territories where Hezbollah operates (the United States, European countries, and South America).

For a detailed list of recommendations, see the policy paper, “[An Opportunity to Shape a New Reality with Lebanon](#),” INSS, September 8, 2025.

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