



War in Syria Turned Hezbollah into a Powerful Army

OE Watch Commentary: While Lebanese Hezbollah has long sought to depict itself as a Lebanese nationalist organization seeking to defend Lebanon and ‘resist’ Israeli aggression, the civil war in Syria has belied this notion. It has been noted that Hezbollah’s deployment into Syria alongside Iranian advisors to defend Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against the Syrian opposition had nothing to do with Lebanese sovereignty and everything to do with acting upon Iranian commands to preserve the Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah axis.

While Hezbollah has lost hundreds (if not thousands) of fighters in Syria, the accompanying excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency* reports how former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Yahya Safavi assessed that the experience has augmented Hezbollah’s military capabilities. After all, Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 ended the active phase of Hezbollah combat. The Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 was less a ground fight than an aerial campaign, with Hezbollah seeking to survive Israeli bombardment. This meant that between 2000 and the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, a new generation of Hezbollah fighters effectively had no real combat experience. Syria, however, has become both a trial by fire for Hezbollah recruits, where only the strong and competent survive, as well as a laboratory to test tactics and weaponry against a potent enemy.

Safavi’s comments suggesting that Hezbollah is the vanguard of “a powerful united Islamic army” raises the prospect that Iran might use Hezbollah as a mercenary force to be used elsewhere (possibly in Yemen or Iraq) as a proxy to undermine adversaries and advance Iranian interests while maintaining the fiction of Iran’s own non-intervention. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Hezbollah flag flying over an abandoned artillery piece on the grounds of the former SLA prison in Khiam.

Source: Paul Keller - Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/paulk/354323204/>, CC 2.0.

Source: “Jang Suriya Hezbollah ra beh yek Artesh Qodratmand Tabdil Karad” (“The War turned Hezbollah into a Powerful Army”), *Mehr News Agency*, 17 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/8e1d84>

[Former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Commander Yahya] Safavi stated, “Lebanese Hezbollah was both a guerrilla organization and a movement. And as a result of the Syrian war, it has transformed into a powerful regular army that stands up to the Zionists alongside the Lebanese Army to defend the people and the land of Lebanon. It is true that the Syrian war has lasted 83 months and has produced a number of martyrs, but Hezbollah has become an army, much like before the eight-year [Iran-Iraq] War the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps wasn’t a military organization but as a result of the war, we became a powerful army. Now Hezbollah is a powerful military arm... A powerful united Islamic army has arisen in Syria.

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EGYPT AND ISRAEL TUNNEL NEUTRALIZATION EFFORTS IN GAZA

by LUCAS WINTER, FMSO