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U.S. Must Reevaluate Lebanon Aid Amid Hizballah's Rise

The Lebanese parliament has selected the Hizballah-backed, pro-Syrian Najib Mikati as Lebanon's prime minister. Hizballah forced the collapse of the previous government for refusing to denounce the U.N. Special Tribunal investigating former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's assassination. With Hizballah's handpicked candidate now in the lead, the terrorist group may dominate the new government. The United States should carefully reevaluate the wisdom of continued assistance to Lebanon at this delicate moment.

The Iranian-backed terrorist group Hizballah and its political allies may assume control of the Lebanese government.

- On January 25, Hizballah-backed candidate Najib Mikati became the prime minister of Lebanon after receiving support from the Hizballah-led opposition and other minority parties in the parliament.
- Hizballah forced the collapse of the previous government after failing to coerce pro-Western Prime Minister Saad Hariri to denounce the Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the assassination of his father, the former prime minister.
- Hizballah and its allies could, as a result, control all government decision-making. The close cooperation among Hizballah, Syria and Iran now casts doubt about the future of Lebanese sovereignty and autonomy, including the independence of the Lebanese Armed Forces.
- Mikati will likely be dependent on the support of Hizballah to remain in power and is unlikely to make any decision that contradicts the wishes of the terrorist group.
- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Hizballah's withdrawal from the previous government a "transparent effort" by the terrorist group and its foreign backers Iran and Syria to "subvert justice and undermine Lebanon's stability."
- In testimony before the House Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee on March 2, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said he is "very concerned about a Lebanese government where, even if Hizballah... is not represented as the prime minister or holds significant cabinet positions, nonetheless exercises a relatively effective control over that government.



The Iranian-backed Hizballah has handpicked the new Lebanese prime minister and is expanding its political control in Lebanon.

Hizballah is a radical Islamist terrorist group backed by Iran and Syria that poses a direct threat to U.S. interests in the region and Israel.

- Hizballah, a U.S.-designated terrorist group since 1995, has killed more Americans than any terrorist group other than al-Qaeda, including 241 U.S. servicemen in the October 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut.
- With the support of Iran and Syria, Hizballah has amassed an arsenal of more than 55,000 short- and long-range rockets threatening all major Israeli population centers.
- Iran and Syria are transferring increasingly sophisticated weapons to Hizballah, including hundreds of M-600 Syrian guided rockets. With a range of 155 miles and accuracy within 330 feet, these rockets represent a significant strategic improvement of Hizballah's capabilities.
- Pentagon officials also believe that Syria has transferred 10 SCUD-D missiles to the terrorist group, according to a WikiLeaks report cited by *The New York Times*. These ballistic missiles can target all of Israel and constitute a significant escalation by Syria and Hizballah.
- U.S. officials describe Hizballah as the most technically capable terrorist organization. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has repeatedly stated that Hizballah's missile capabilities dwarf those of most countries and are "destablizing for the whole region."

The United States must reevaluate its aid relationship with Lebanon in light of Hizballah's enlarged role in the government.

- With Hizballah's hand-picked candidate now chosen as Lebanon's prime minister, Congress should reevaluate U.S. funding for the Lebanese Armed Forces. The United States should make sure that military assistance to Lebanon in no way aids Hizballah and facilitates Lebanon's implementation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.
- If Hizballah comes to dominate the new Lebanese government, the United States should suspend its aid package to Lebanon, including U.S. foreign assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces.
- The United States should increase pressure on Hizballah and its allies in Syria and Iran by targeting Hizballah's financial networks, including those Lebanese banks that provide financial services to the terrorist group.
- The United States should continue to back the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which is opposed by Hizballah and Syria, and assist it to successfully prosecute those who assassinated Rafik Hariri.