

# MEMO

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## **Lebanese Elections Demonstrate Growing Influence of Iran and Hezbollah**

The Lebanese parliament has elected as president Gen. Michel Aoun—a close ally of Iranian-backed Hezbollah—ending a two-year vacancy in the country's top position. The election of Aoun demonstrates the immense and growing influence Iran and its terrorist proxy Hezbollah maintain over Lebanon. Iran and its allies continue their quest to dominate the Middle East. The United States should increase pressure on Hezbollah and scrutinize assistance to Lebanon to ensure it meets American objectives.

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### **The United States should increase pressure on Hezbollah and review assistance to Lebanon in light of Hezbollah's elevated role.**

- The United States must increase efforts to stop the flow of funds and weapons to Hezbollah.
- The United States must not give President Aoun a free pass. America should make clear that we expect him to: ensure the Lebanese Armed Forces do not cooperate with Hezbollah; block Hezbollah from accessing the Lebanese banking system; and support international efforts to hold the terrorist group in check.
- The United States cannot view this outcome as “business as usual.” It must scrutinize U.S. aid to Lebanon to ensure it is consistent with U.S. objectives, and it must press for implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, which required all non-state armed groups in Lebanon to disarm and have been disregarded for far too long.

### **The Iranian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah stymied efforts to elect a new Lebanese president for over two years.**

- On Oct. 31, Hezbollah-backed candidate Michel Aoun became the president of Lebanon after securing 83 votes in the 128-seat parliament. According to the National Pact, a power-sharing agreement established in 1942, the president must be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister (appointed by the president) must be a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the parliament must be a Shia Muslim.
- After 45 failed attempts to elect a new president, Sunni leader Saad al-Hariri switched allegiances to support Aoun, ensuring that Hezbollah's preferred candidate had enough votes to win the presidency. Al-Hariri stunningly backed Hezbollah despite its direct role in the 2005 assassination of his father, former Prime Minister Rafic al-Hariri.
- President Aoun supported Hezbollah's 2006 war against Israel, backed its 2008 Beirut takeover and endorsed the group's intervention in Syria. Aoun opposes disarming Hezbollah and may now use his authority as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces to strengthen ties between the Lebanese army and Hezbollah's militia.
- President Aoun will likely need Hezbollah support for any significant decisions, and is unlikely to contradict the wishes of the terrorist group.

- Hezbollah will now hold significant sway over the three most important people within the Lebanese government: Maronite Christian President Michel Aoun; [soon-to-be](#) Sunni Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Hariri; and the Shia Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri.
- In response to the elections, Ali Akbar Velayati, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's top foreign policy adviser, said: "The election of Michel Aoun as president shows new support for the Islamic resistance. This is surely a victory for Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of (Hezbollah and) Islamic Resistance in Lebanon."

**Hezbollah—the radical Islamist terrorist group backed by Iran—poses a direct threat to U.S. interests in the region and Israel.**

- Hezbollah, 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, Hezbollah has amassed an arsenal of more than 150,000 missiles and rockets, many of which can precisely target any location in Israel.
- Hezbollah's refusal to disarm is a direct violation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701. Hezbollah's state sponsor Iran has instead increased its arms transfers to the terrorist group at an alarming rate.
- Hezbollah continues to fight in Syria while strengthening its hold on Lebanese politics. Aoun and al-Hariri offer the veneer of legitimacy to Hezbollah while the group continues to build its terrorist infrastructure and target Israel.
- On Oct. 6, Israeli police indicted six Israeli Arabs for espionage and cross-border drug and arms smuggling for Hezbollah.

**Iran continues to foment instability throughout the region.**

- Iran and Hezbollah have significantly contributed to the violent civil war in Syria by providing fighters and arms to support the Assad regime.
- In Iraq, Iranian-backed Shiite militias have joined the battle to retake Mosul. The Shiite militias seek Iranian domination, not a pluralistic Iraq, and their participation may ultimately serve to exacerbate internal strife in the country.
- Iran has stepped up its arming and funding of Shiite opposition groups in Bahrain and the Houthis in Yemen, who unseated a government that was a key U.S. counterterrorism ally. Houthi rebels have recently begun targeting U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf.