

Beirut vs Tehran: Ali Larijani's visit and Lebanon's struggle for sovereignty

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 17.08.2025

Ali Larijani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, visited Beirut at a moment of peak tension between Iran and Lebanon.

His visit coincided with Lebanon's efforts to reclaim its sovereignty, which it has effectively lost to Iran since Hezbollah's founding in the 1980s. For decades, Beirut was powerless in the face of Tehran's influence, paying the price for being, in practice, a "state within a state" created by Hezbollah under Iranian patronage. For years, Lebanon was a clear sphere of influence for Iran. Tehran exploited Beirut's weakness, using the country as fertile operational ground for the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. But after Hezbollah's weakening on Lebanon's internal front, following its defeat by Israel, the country is experiencing profound upheaval.

Lebanon's revival

Lebanon has risen anew, with its leaders, particularly President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, seeking to establish a new political order that curtails Hezbollah, which they view as the root of Lebanon's security, political, economic, and social challenges. In this context, Lebanon's government made the historic decision on August 5 to disarm Hezbollah. This effort is being led by Aoun, Salam, and Foreign Minister Youssef Reji, who even boycotted Larijani's visit.

Aoun and Salam made their outrage over Tehran's recent blatant interference in Lebanon's domestic affairs clear to Larijani and communicated it publicly through the Lebanese media. The president emphasized that Lebanon is determined to be sovereign and protested recent statements by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Ali-Akbar Velayati, an adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, against disarming Hezbollah.

The prime minister clarified to Larijani that Lebanon does not need Hezbollah to force Israel to withdraw from the five positions in the south, contrary to the Iranian claim, and stressed Lebanon's commitment to implement its decision through its army, disarming Hezbollah by the end of 2025.

Iranian meddling

Larijani's statements following his meeting with Parliament Speaker and Amal chair Nabih Berri made it clear that Iran will not easily relinquish its strategic proxy. In practice, he contradicted himself. While Tehran has meddled in Lebanon for 43 years, he claimed, "Iran did not offer a plan to Lebanon, only the US did," and urged the Lebanese to reject American interference.

He also asserted that Iran does not interfere in Lebanon's decision-making while simultaneously calling on Lebanon to cancel its disarmament plan, claiming that the US and Israel seek through political pressure what they failed to achieve through war.

Coinciding with Larijani's trip, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Eyal Zamir visited IDF positions in southern Lebanon, and a Hezbollah operative was targeted near Bint Jbail, highlighting Lebanon's strategic predicament. On the one hand, Israel pursues a consistent strategy to prevent Hezbollah from rebuilding. On the other hand, Iran retains significant influence in Lebanon through Hezbollah's missile arsenal and the support of the vast majority of Lebanon's Shi'ite community.

While Hezbollah supporters welcomed Larijani in Beirut's southern suburbs, Iranian reformist media revealed that Lebanese political opponents of Hezbollah recently considered expelling the Iranian ambassador but withdrew after realizing the move was impractical.

US and Israel's role

The Trump administration's push for Hezbollah's disarmament places Lebanon in an especially difficult position. Lebanon is working to curb the terror group's influence, exemplified by the sudden August 12 dismissal of Maher Raad, head of Lebanese army intelligence in Dahiyeh, who is close to Hezbollah and a relative of the Hezbollah parliamentary faction leader Mohammad Raad. At the same time, efforts to challenge the group have already cost Lebanese army lives, as seen on August 9 when six soldiers died while clearing ammunition from a Hezbollah weapons depot near the Israeli border.

The United States' ambition to achieve rapid results against Hezbollah could harm Lebanon. With significant support from Lebanon's Shi'ite community, Hezbollah has staged shows of force in recent days, clearly signaling that it will not relinquish its arms, which it sees as essential to its existence.

Israel cannot be content merely with preventing Hezbollah's reconstruction; it must also work to undermine its social base among Lebanon's Shi'ites. A long-

term strategy is needed, in which the US invests in creating an alternative network to Hezbollah's Dawa structure and supports anti-Hezbollah actors among Lebanese Shiites.

This approach can challenge the vast infrastructure Iran has built in the form of Hezbollah, whose Shi'ite community forms the base of its political power and manpower. Simultaneously, in the short term, Israel and the US should intensify economic pressure on Hezbollah to hinder its ability to maintain its influence within the Shi'ite community and, ideally, limit its capacity to pay its operatives. Published in The Jerusalem Post, August 18, 2025.