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# Hezbollah power struggle underway

**Two rival leaders are struggling for control of Hezbollah, against the backdrop of internecine rivalry in Iran.**

General **Qassem Suleimani**, the commander of the **Guardians of the Revolution's** elite **Al-Quds** force, paid a brief visit to Beirut at the end of February to try to alleviate the growing tension between **Hassan Nasrallah**, **Hezbollah's** secretary-general, and the movement's number two, **Naim Qassem**. The slow-burning dispute erupted into a fully-fledged row in 2008, shortly after Nasrallah's was reappointed the organisation's chief for the fourth time. Qassem, who recently published a biography of **Ayatollah Khomeini** and has designs on becoming the Lebanese *Shi'ites'* supreme leader, complained to others in the organization that Nasrallah had "*confiscated power like a dictator*". The movement's charter places a limit of two four-year mandates on the position of secretary-general.

While Nasrallah is aligned to Iranian President **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**, Qassem has hitched his wagon to Supreme Leader **Ali Khamenei**. At the beginning of February he travelled to Tehran to meet Khamenei, accompanied by **Mohamed Yazbek**, Khamenei's representative in the Lebanese *Shi'ite* movement. The two men painted a gloomy picture of Nasrallah's misdeeds and failure to respect the movement's internal regulations, as well as his alleged \$2 million monthly expenditure on 1,500 security agents in charge of his personal safety. Qassem also complained about **Hachem Safieddine**, the president of the movement's executive council, who is Nasrallah's cousin on his mother's side, and **Wafic Safa**, the head of security, whom they accused of lining his pockets at Hezbollah's expense.

The Syrian crisis, in which Nasrallah has heavily engaged Hezbollah, has made it virtually impossible for the organization to broach an internal shake-up at the moment. In time, however, Qassem will be vying to take over as Hezbollah's political and religious supreme leader and relegate Nasrallah to the military role he played so well during the war with Israel in Southern Lebanon in 2006.