

# Lebanon: Hezbollah and Future Movement relations on the up

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Sources say rivals cooperating on security issues

Beirut, *Asharq Al-Awsat*—Relations between the Lebanese Future Movement and Hezbollah have started to show signs of improvement, after three years of tension worsened by the outbreak of the Syrian crisis and Hezbollah's participation in the fighting there, according to Lebanese sources.

Sources close to Hezbollah told *Asharq Al-Awsat*: "Direct contact between the two parties started around 12 days ago," and that this constituted "serious dialogue and contact which may lead to some sort of an understanding."

The sources added that "[Hezbollah] is optimistic about recent developments in the relations with the Future Movement and the current atmosphere is quite good."

They also said there was security coordination between the two parties, which was evidenced by the participation of a senior member of Hezbollah's Coordination and Liaison Unit, Wafiq Safa, in a security meeting which included commanders of the security departments, led by Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk, who is affiliated to the Future Movement, to discuss the issue of the border town of Tufail around 10 days ago.

Safa's participation in the meeting raised condemnations from a number of March 14 Alliance members and activists who said Machnouk gave "legitimacy to Hezbollah's arms and their fighting in Syria."

The interior minister said Hezbollah participated in the security meeting because "they are part of the conflict inside Syria and that it is militarily present in Syrian territory . . . And, therefore, no plan of this scale can be put in place without coordinating with them."

However, the Future Movement did not show great enthusiasm for the new openness to Hezbollah, with many members saying it should not have been allowed to become part of Lebanon's new cabinet unless it withdrew its fighters from Syria.

A leading figure and former MP in the Future Movement, Mustafa Alloush, said: "There are still differences on the central issues with Hezbollah, especially regarding its fighting in Syria and the logic of its participation in the government, and its insistence that it is a resistance [force]."

Alloush told *Asharq Al-Awsat* that the current dialogue was between Hezbollah and state institutions on specific security issues, which explained the participation of Safa in the security meeting related to the town of Tufail.



Lebanese General Security forces sit behind tables after they set up a temporary checkpoint to put an exit and entry stamps for the citizens who want to leave or enter the Tufail village at the Lebanese–Syrian border, eastern Lebanon, on Tuesday, April 22, 2014. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

He added: “The dialogue with the party, if it takes place, will happen indirectly and not at high level, and it will be limited to guaranteeing stability in Lebanon,” and that talks with Hezbollah “will endeavor to reach understandings to bring it in line with the state’s policies and end involvement in international conflicts, and to stop allowing Lebanon to be used as a pawn by regional parties.”

Health Minister Wael Abu-Faour, who is affiliated with the National Struggle Front led by Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, announced following the formation of the government that Jumblatt would continue to hold discussions with with former head of the Future Movement leader Fouad Siniora and Hezbollah leaders.

Both parties “confirmed their firm willingness to start a new phase in their relations,” he said.

Strategic analyst Amin Hattit, who is seen as having close links to Hezbollah, said the current relationship between Hezbollah and the Future Movement was aimed only at achieving the interest of the two parties.

Hattit told *Asharq Al-Awsat*: “[I] expect understandings between the two to not be limited to security issues, but to also include political dossiers, especially with the presidential election ahead [of us], and the fact that there will be no president elected if they failed to agree.”

He added: “No mechanism has been formulated yet regarding the presidency, but there is no doubt that its features will become clearer in the coming days.”