



Sheikh Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah's Newly-Appointed Secretary General

November 4, 2024

Overview¹

- ▶ On October 29, 2024, Hezbollah announced that the Shura Council had appointed Sheikh Na'im Qassem as the organization's new secretary general, replacing Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli strike on Beirut on September 27, 2024. In his first speech Qassem pledged to continue in Nasrallah's path and said Hezbollah would end the current war against Israel only on its own terms.
- ▶ Qassem is one of Hezbollah's founders and has served as the deputy secretary general since 1991. However, he has no military training and is considered the organization's chief ideologue, focusing on Hezbollah's political and social aspects.
- ▶ One of Hezbollah's most important spokesmen, in his books and public statements he has justified the "resistance" against Israel and denied its right to exist. He has also admitted that Hezbollah operates according to directives from Iran.
- ▶ **Qassem was not considered the leading candidate to replace Hassan Nasrallah, but he was appointed by default after the elimination of Hashem Safi al-Din, the head of Hezbollah's Executive Council, who had been marked as Nasrallah's designated successor. In ITIC assessment, the objective of appointing Na'im Qassem was to represent continuity within the organization's leadership during ongoing combat with Israel, with Hezbollah likely to choose a permanent secretary general after a lasting ceasefire has been achieved. Despite Qassem's long role in Hezbollah, his lack of military experience means Iran can be expected to oversee Hezbollah's fighting by means of representatives from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and its Qods Force, and to influence Hezbollah's combat against Israel and decisions regarding a potential ceasefire.**

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Na'im Qassem Appointed as Hezbollah Secretary General

Hezbollah's Announcement

► On October 29, 2024, Hezbollah announced the appointment of Sheikh Na'im Qassem to replace Hassan Nasrallah as the organization's secretary general, after Nasrallah was killed in an Israeli airstrike on the Dahiyeh al-Janoubia in Beirut on September 27, 2024. Hezbollah announced that the Shura Council had appointed Qassem to carry the "blessed flag on this journey, adhering to the principles and goals of Hezbollah and in accordance with the agreed-upon mechanism for choosing the secretary general." The announcement added that Hezbollah was committed to working together to achieve the organization's principles and goals and to ensure that the "flame of resistance" continued to burn and that its flag kept flying until "victory is achieved" (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, October 29, 2024).

First speech

► A day after his appointment, Qassem delivered his first speech as secretary general, in which he addressed Hezbollah's activities under his leadership and outlined the organization's position amid ongoing fighting against Israel (al-Manar, October 30, 2024):

- ◆ **Appointment as Hezbollah secretary general:** He thanked the Shura Council for choosing him and promised to serve the path of jihad fighters and shaheeds. He said he bore "with reverence" the trust passed down from previous secretary generals Abbas al-Musawi and Hassan Nasrallah, and would serve the path of jihad and "resistance." He also emphasized that he would continue Nasrallah's political, jihad and social plans, and that Hezbollah would remain "on the path of war in accordance with the political directions decided on."
- ◆ **Support for the war in Gaza:** He claimed it was an obligation to support the Palestinians because, he claimed Israel posed a threat to the region. He criticized those who do not assist the Gaza Strip.
- ◆ **Hezbollah's attacks on Israel:** He said Hezbollah could not wait for Israel to attack and then lose everything, thus the organization carried out "preemptive attacks in self-defense" which would lead to "liberation." He added that the fighting in Lebanon and Gaza was part of a global Israeli-American-European war whose objective was to eradicate "the resistance" and the people of the region.

- ◆ **"Defending Lebanon:"** He said Hezbollah fought alongside the Amal Movement and "all the people of south Lebanon, the Beqa'a, the Lebanese, and the people of the mountains" to protect Lebanon and liberate its lands. In response to accusations that Hezbollah was an Iranian proxy, he claimed ID did not act "on behalf of anyone or for the benefit of anyone's plan" and that although Iran supported the organization, Hezbollah did not fight for it.
- ◆ **Setbacks for Hezbollah:** He acknowledged that the setbacks the organization suffered, beginning with the pager attack on September 17, 2024, and the killing of senior leaders, including Nasrallah, were "painful." However, he claimed Hezbollah had already filled all the positions, and all current senior leaders had experience from the war in Syria, with additional replacements in place to ensure continuity.
- ◆ **Attacks on Israel:** He explained that missiles and rockets were launched according to a pre-set plan and that Israel could not deal with Hezbollah's rockets and UAVs. He claimed [falsely] Hezbollah targeted only military camps, tanks and soldiers, while Israel attacked civilians. He also boasted about the UAV attack on the private residence of the Israeli prime minister in Caesarea, justifying it as a response to Nasrallah's killing.
- ◆ **Ending the war:** He said Hezbollah was "not begging" for a ceasefire and was prepared to continue fighting. If Israel wants to stop, Hezbollah will be ready, but "under suitable conditions." He said they were coordinated with the Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, who is managing negotiations, and claimed that no plan acceptable to Israel had yet been presented that Hezbollah could discuss.



Na'im Qassem gives his first speech as secretary general (al-'Ahed, October 30, 2024).

Media commentary

►The announcement came after "knowledgeable sources" claimed the appointment of a new Hezbollah secretary general had been postponed and was expected to occur only after a ceasefire had been achieved, as the Shura Council was unable to convene under the current

conditions. The "sources" claimed that for the near future, Hezbollah would prefer to rely on joint leadership, as has been the case since Nasrallah's death. The "sources" also noted that there were several candidates for the position, including Na'im Qassem, who was not a favorite, or Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, head of the Political Council, or even an unknown figure (al-Nashra, October 26, 2024).

►Following Qassem's appointment, "sources close to Hezbollah" reported that Iran had endorsed him and approved. According to the "sources," the other candidate was Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, but Tehran refused to allow him to lead Hezbollah because he was "unique in his views." The "sources" further stated that the objective of appointing Na'im Qassem was to promote a ceasefire and organize Hezbollah's activities at this stage, though it was a "temporary" appointment and a new secretary general would be chosen after a ceasefire (al-Hadath, October 29, 2024).

►A "person familiar" with both Nasrallah and Qassem said they had almost nothing in common. According to the "person," Nasrallah was open, friendly, spontaneous and unpretentious, while Qassem was the complete opposite, and he was even accused of representing Hezbollah's bourgeoisie with his general appearance and lifestyle. It was also noted that while Qassem had been deputy for both al-Musawi and later Nasrallah, there was an understanding within the party that he was not the second most important figure in the organization. That figure was Hashem Safi al-Din, head of the Executive Council, who was killed in an Israeli strike in early October 2024. "Knowledgeable sources" indicated that the appointment was "transitional" and that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps would effectively oversee the organization's activities. That was why Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi revealed that he had left a permanent representative in Beirut, as did the Revolutionary Guards (Asas Media, October 31, 2024).

►"Sources" with information about Hezbollah's internal affairs said Hashem Safi al-Din was a hardliner and opposed any compromise with Israel, and made decisions without hesitation, similar to Nasrallah. In contrast, Qassem was considered more flexible, despite his firm appearance in televised speeches about Israel or internal rivals in Lebanon, and he was even responsible for reconciling Hezbollah with Saudi Arabia after the Second Lebanon War. "Sources close to Hezbollah" added that Qassem's appointment was compatible with the appointments of Iran's president, vice president and foreign minister, who wanted to build a

bridge to the West. He could become the man of the hour if he succeeds in leading Hezbollah to a ceasefire and addressing internal issues in Lebanon (Lebanon Files, October 30, 2024).

Milestones and Activity

► Sheikh Na'im Qassem is a longtime member of Hezbollah. He was not involved in Hezbollah's military activities but is regarded as the organization's ideologue, focusing on its civil and religious aspects (LBCI, September 30, 2024; al-Jazeera, October 29, 2024; Reuters, October 29, 2024):

- ◆ He was born in the al-Basta al-Tahta area of Beirut in 1953 to a Shi'ite family from Kafr Kila in south Lebanon. He is married and has six children, four sons and two daughters.
- ◆ He has a degree in chemistry and religious studies from the Lebanese University. One of his religious mentors was Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, one of the most senior Shi'ite religious leaders in Lebanon and Hezbollah's spiritual leader. Qassem was also one of the founders of the Lebanese Muslim Students Association and chaired the Islamic Religious Education Association from 1974 to 1988.
- ◆ In 1974 Qassem joined the Amal Movement, serving as deputy head of cultural affairs before being appointed secretary of the Leadership Council and responsible for doctrine and culture. He left Amal after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, returning to his religious studies while simultaneously teaching in Shi'ite mosques.
- ◆ After Israel entered Lebanon in 1982 he joined Hezbollah's founding core, becoming one of its prominent religious figures.
- ◆ On May 22, 1991, Qassem was elected deputy secretary general of Hezbollah during the organization's second assembly, serving under secretary general Abbas al-Musawi. After al-Musawi was killed in an Israeli strike in February 1992, Hassan Nasrallah was appointed as his successor, and Qassem served as his deputy for 32 years, until Nasrallah was killed on September 27, 2024.
- ◆ As deputy secretary general, he was a member of Hezbollah's Shura Council. He became responsible for participation in the Lebanese parliamentary elections beginning in 1992, managing the activities of Hezbollah's parliamentarians and ministers, and overseeing the organization's social initiatives, while not dealing with its military affairs. He also represented the organization at various events in Lebanon and Iran, such as the funeral of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in May 2024.



Na'im Qassem gives a speech (Nahrainnet News Agency, October 30, 2024)

- ◆ Qassem is also considered a prominent Hezbollah spokesman. Following Nasrallah's death, he became the organization's highest-ranking public figure, delivering three televised speeches within three weeks (September 30, 2024; October 8, 2024; and October 15, 2024). In the speeches he sought to downplay the significance of Israel's impact on Hezbollah, emphasized the organization's achievements in its fight against Israel, reaffirmed Hezbollah's continued support for Gaza, opposed separating the fronts in the effort to achieve a ceasefire and justified the fighting as a "defense of Lebanon."²
- ◆ In May 2018, the United States Treasury Department added members of Hezbollah's Shura Council, including Na'im Qassem, to its designated list of terrorists.



Na'im Qassem gives his first speech after Nasrallah's death (al-Manar, September 30, 2024)

Writings

- Qassem has written at least 15 books on Hezbollah and on Shi'a and social issues, including the status of women, the roles of teachers and students, the rights of husbands and wives, and parental responsibilities towards children (Middle East Eye, November 1, 2024).

² For further information, see the ITIC reports, "Spotlight on Terrorism, Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria" from [September 23-30, 2024](#), [October 7-16, 2024](#) and [October 14-28, 2024](#).

► One of Qassem's seminal works was Hezbollah: The Story from Within (2002). In it, Qassem outlines the history of the organization, its ideology and the principles driving it.

- ◆ A full chapter is devoted to suicide bombing attacks (istishhad). Qassem examines the religious justification for suicide attacks, viewing them as "the main source of power which can be relied on, whose effectiveness has already been proven in practice." He praises the achievements of such operations in Lebanon but emphasizes that the "weapon" should be used selectively and only in operations that would inflict heavy losses on the enemy, and not "wasted on routine actions."
- ◆ He denies Israel's right to exist, arguing that "the creation of the Zionist entity in the land of Palestine was an act of aggression against the peaceful Palestinian people" and that "without the ongoing international conspiracy (especially in the case of the United States) through the UN or independently, Israel would not exist."
- ◆ He justifies Palestinian attacks on civilian populations in Israel by arguing that "the soldiers hide from battle and seek refuge in villages and towns behind civilian shields, and as settlers continue to kill and attack, they turn the Israeli population into a kind of army, making society a community of aggressors."



The cover of Qassem's book on Hezbollah (Noor Publishing website)

► In 2008, Qassem published a book called The Society of Resistance, the Desire for Martyrdom, and the Creation of Victory, which provided an in-depth theoretical explanation of the establishment of a "society of resistance" and the methods used to unify the Shi'ite community around Hezbollah's military activities. According to the concept Qassem promoted and which Hezbollah adopted in creating a state within a state, "resistance" is "a social outlook in all its dimensions: military, cultural, political, and informational resistance."³

³ For further information, see the March 2020 ITIC report, "[The Association for the Revival of Resistance Legacy: A Hezbollah foundation intended to inculcate jihad and the shaheed culture within Shiite](#)"

Selected Quotes

The confrontation with Israel

► Qassem has consistently related to the need for continued "resistance" against Israel, including through suicide bombing attacks:

- ◆ After an Israeli military unit abducted senior Amal figure Mustafa Dirani in May 1994, Qassem warned that the abduction "paved the way for a broad confrontation." He added that "an open-ended confrontation has begun, which cannot be stopped... If Israel carried out the abduction to show its long reach, [it will see that] the organization has an even longer reach" (BBC Radio, May 22, 1994).
- ◆ "Every person should aspire to shahada [martyrdom]. Israel cannot be defeated without istishhad [martyrdom for the sake of Allah] and the regional balance cannot change without resistance that leads to a large group of istishhadiyyin [shaheeds]" (al-Manar, October 10, 2002).
- ◆ "The Israeli enemy, which succeeds in creating divisions in various ways and cannot be dealt with, will see attacks being carried out one after another, Allah willing, and Israel will not succeed in determining its future. It can kill, but it cannot survive. It can attack, but it cannot ensure its existence. We will all fight it until we liberate Palestine" (NBN Channel, November 17, 2002).

► Since the beginning of the current conflict with Israel on October 8, 2023, Qassem has appeared in interviews with media outlets in Lebanon and abroad and has delivered public speeches presenting Hezbollah's policy on the use of force to establish the [so-called] "equation of deterrence."⁴

- ◆ He said that attacks on civilians would have a response different from attacks on Hezbollah "fighters," claiming, Israel would pay the price among its civilians "because that is the only way [Israel] understand[s]" (Simia, November 8, 2023).
- ◆ He stated that if Israel extended its strikes in Lebanon, the organization would extend its "responses" through what he called the "fourth range," meaning the use of new

society in Lebanon," and the December 2020 report, "[The civilian infrastructure established by Hezbollah among the Shiite population in Lebanon: the city of Bint Jbeil as a case study.](#)"

⁴ For further information, see the July 2024 ITIC report, "[Hezbollah's Policy for the Use of Force against Israel.](#)"

rockets and missiles with greater destructive power and longer range (Lebanon24, January 27, 2024).

- ◆ He claimed that any Israeli decision to expand the conflict, regardless of how "limited" the expansion was, would lead to an escalation to deter Israel, and it should expect "significant losses" (al-Nashra, June 15, 2024).
- ◆ He said that since the start of the conflict, the fighting in south Lebanon had been to support Gaza, and the operational range would be three to five kilometers from the border, with strikes limited to military, intelligence and informational targets, avoiding attacks on civilians. However, he added that when Israel crossed the operational range or attacked civilians, Hezbollah was duty-bound to provide a suitable response suitable for its "plan." (Sputnik in Arabic, July 5, 2024).
- ◆ At the funeral of senior Hezbollah terrorist Ibrahim Aqil, who was killed in an Israeli strike on September 20, 2024, he accused Israel of committing "war crimes" and stated that the fighting has entered a new phase, which he called the "unsettled account campaign" (al-'Ahed, September 22, 2024).

The connection between Hezbollah's leadership and its military wing

► Qassem presented Hezbollah as a single unit with no practical separation between the organization's political leadership and its military bodies:

- ◆ "We are a political party that prioritizes 'resistance,' as the 'struggle' against Israel and the confrontation with the occupation are political actions. We believe that political activity integrates with resistance actions, which are an inseparable part of political activity" (Lebanese television, January 23, 2003).
- ◆ "If there were a military wing separate from the political wing, it would have an impact and expressions in the political arena. However, Hezbollah has one leadership called the Shura Council, which decides and manages political, jihadist, cultural and social activities. The secretary general of Hezbollah is the head of the Shura Council and also the head of the Jihad Council, meaning we have [one] leadership and one administration" (al-Mustaqbal, December 31, 2000).



**Right: Na'im Qassem dressed as a Shi'ite cleric (X account of Ghadi Francis, October 26, 2024).
Left: Qassem in military uniform (X account of Fadi, October 29, 2024).**

The ties to Iran

►Although in his inaugural speech as Hezbollah's secretary general, Qassem rejected the claims of Hezbollah's opponents that the organization operated on behalf of Iran, over the years he has not concealed that Hezbollah is subservient to the authority of the Tehran regime and acts according to its directives:

- ◆ He stated that Hezbollah was obligated to receive religious guidance for conducting the fight against Israel from the wali al-faqih⁵ concerning rocket fire at Israeli civilians and the execution of suicide operations. He said that Hezbollah "has channels through which we can clarify what is permitted and forbidden and what our obligations are, and where we are allowed to act at our discretion" (al-Kawthar TV, Iran, April 16, 2007).
- ◆ He called Hezbollah a "Shi'ite religious-political party" which had to have religious and political legitimacy from a leadership authorized to provide it with such legitimacy. He claimed that initially, Imam Khomeini granted legitimacy, and afterward it was Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who set the "general guidelines that absolve us of guilt and grant us legitimacy" (Nahar al-Shabab, July 30, 2009).
- ◆ He said Hezbollah was proud of its ties with Iran and called on regional countries to strengthen their relations with Tehran to enhance regional stability. He claimed Iran had changed the face of the Middle East, revitalized the Palestinian issue, and supported Hezbollah and Syria. Thanks to Iranian support, he said, in 2000 the organization had

⁵ A religious figure who is also a ruler; the title of the Ayatollah Khomeini, it is currently held by Ali Khamenei.

achieved its first victory against the "Zionist enemy" and liberated south Lebanon (Fars, February 18, 2017).



Na'im Qassem with Ali Khamenei (X account of Abbas al-Kaabi, October 29, 2024)

Palestinian terrorism

► During Palestinian terrorist attacks on Israel during the second intifada, Qassem expressed support for the actions of the "resistance" organizations and called for their expansion:

- ◆ "We wish to help our Palestinian brothers because the Israeli occupation extends from Palestine to Lebanon and Syria. Our assistance takes various forms, including military aid when possible, as well as financial, media and political support. It is also reflected in the preparedness in south Lebanon to prevent Israel from exploiting the situation and to ensure it does not remain content" (NTV channel, April 21, 2002).
- ◆ "We support the suicide operation carried out by Hamas in Tel Aviv, and we consider it an act of nobility and honor, and a legitimate defensive [sic] action against the Israeli occupation" (al-Manar, May 9, 2002).



Qassem with the late Isma'il Haniyeh, former head of Hamas' political bureau (Rasad News, May 3, 2024)

Condemnation of the United States

► Qassem presented clear anti-American positions similar to Iran's view of the United States as the "Great Satan." He accused the United States of employing "terrorism" in the Middle East and attempting to impose its will on the region, while supporting Israel's "massacres:"

- ◆ "The American administration adopts policies that we must stand against; on the other hand, we should maintain relations with the American people, whether directly or indirectly. When we refer to the United States as the 'Great Satan' we mean American policy and not the esteemed American people" (Orbit TV, June 21, 1998).
- ◆ "As long as American terrorism directed against us increases we will defend ourselves, confront it and prevent it from achieving its objectives and aspirations" (Radio Nour, February 4, 2002).
- ◆ "The Americans are using their military experience to achieve three objectives: to take direct control of Iraqi oil, as it has the largest oil reserves in the region; to bring about political changes and redraw the regional map, thus strengthening American control over the region's resources; and to impose political solutions that would grant Israel additional gains and help it undermine Palestinian rights" (Radio Nour, February 23, 2003).