

By Reva Bhalla
Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad arrived in Beirut on Oct. 13 for his first official visit to Lebanon since becoming president in 2005. He is reportedly returning to the country after spending a stint there in the 1980s as a young Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officer tasked with training Hezbollah in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. A great deal of controversy is surrounding his return. Rumors are spreading of Sunni militants attempting to mar the visit by provoking Iran's allies in Hezbollah into a fight (already the car of a pro-Hezbollah imam who has been defending Ahmadinejad has been blown up), while elaborate security preparations are being made for Ahmadinejad to visit Lebanon's heavily militarized border with Israel. Rather than getting caught up in the drama surrounding the Iranian president's visit, we want to take the opportunity provided by all the media coverage to probe into a deeper topic, one that has been occupying the minds of Iranian, Syrian and Hezbollah officials for some time. This topic is the durability of the Iran-Hezbollah-Syria alliance, which STRATFOR believes has been under great stress in recent months. More precisely, the question is: What are Syria's current intentions toward Hezbollah?

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