

6. Security situation

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6.1. Conflict background

Lebanon remains divided along clan, family, confessional, social and regional lines, still marked by the legacy of its prolonged civil war (1975-1990)350 and recurring Israeli attacks.351 Following the creation of Israel in May 1948,352 more than 100 000 Palestinians, mostly from the northern areas of historic Palestine, fled to Lebanon during the mass displacement of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.353 Lebanon together with Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq declared war against the new state, which ended in early 1949 with an armistice354 that brought several years of relative calm along the border between Israel and Lebanon.355

Tensions escalated when Israeli commandos targeted planes at Beirut airport in 1968 following a Palestinian attack on an Israeli airliner.356 In 1970, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) relocated to Lebanon after being expelled from Jordan,357 which triggered border conflicts with Israel,358 after which Lebanon became a target of Israeli military action.359

On 13 April 1975, the Lebanese civil war broke out360 after Palestinian gunmen attacked Maronite Christians in Ain El-Remmaneh, prompting a Phalangist (Maronite Christian militia group361) ambush of a bus carrying Palestinians,362 escalating into fighting between Palestinian factions363 and Phalangist militia led by Bachir Gemayel.364 During the civil war, militias largely followed communal lines, including the Lebanese Front (LF) led by Maronite Christian Phalangists, the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), a coalition of secular leftists and Sunni Muslims supportive of Arab nationalism, the Amal movement composed of Shia factions, 365 and the PLO representing Palestinian refugees, while other actors involved included Syria, Israel, and fragmented Lebanese Army factions.366 The conflict went through several phases 367 and officially ended in October 1990 with the Taif Agreement.368

On the night of 14/15 March 1978, Israel carried out an incursion into southern Lebanon following a militant attack near Tel Aviv, establishing an occupation zone and supporting the South Lebanon Army (SLA), the local Christian militia opposing the PLO. 369 On 15 March 1978, the Lebanese government submitted a claim to the UN Security Council over Israel’s military operation, leading the Council on 19 March 1978 to call for Israel’s withdrawal and approve the creation of UNIFIL, which was deployed on 23 March 1978.370

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon again[371] advancing to and encircling Beirut[372] in response to PLO attacks from the south.[373] President-elect Bachir Pierre Gemayel, a Maronite Christian backed by Israel[374] was assassinated, and in the aftermath,[375] the Phalange militia, allied with Israel, killed up to 3 500 Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila camps.[376]

During the same period, Iran's IRGC created Hezbollah in Lebanon to counter Israel's incursion.[377] PLO forces left Beirut and relocated to neighbouring countries, after a ceasefire was reached.[378] In 1985, after three years, Israel withdrew from Beirut to an 850-square-kilometer zone between the Litani River and the Israeli border, maintaining its presence with the support of SLA.[379] In its first political manifesto, Hezbollah declares Israel as its primary enemy.[380] Israel continued occupying southern Lebanon until 2000.[381] In 2000, as Israel prepared to withdraw from southern Lebanon, the UN verified its pullout along the Blue Line, but the Shebaa Farms, claimed by Lebanon yet considered part of Syria by Israel and the UN, remained under Israeli control.[382] According to the United Nations, no progress has been made in delineating the border between Lebanon and Syria. Although the then caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati announced the creation of a joint Lebanese-Syrian committee to begin the demarcation process in January 2025, both Syria and Israel have yet to respond to the UN's provisional definition of the Shebaa Farms area proposed in 2007.[383]

In addition, tensions along the border persisted with occasional incidents until 2006, when Hezbollah launched a major attack on Israel, triggering Israeli airstrikes and ground operations in Lebanon and marking a major escalation.[384] On 7 September 2006, Israeli forces withdrew from more areas in southern Lebanon as United Nations troops took over their positions ahead of handing them over to Lebanese army units.[385] Israel has reportedly applied the so called 'Dahiya Doctrine' in Lebanon, targeting areas associated with Hezbollah, resulting in extensive damage to civilian infrastructure, neighbourhoods, and civilian casualties.[386]

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