COUNTER
EXTREMISM
PROJECT

Lebanon: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On September 22, 2020, a Hezbollah arms depot exploded in the village of Ain Qana in south Lebanon. Reuters reported there were multiple people wounded in the blast. Hezbollah blamed the explosion on a "technical error" at the depot and denied any casualties. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [1], [Al Jazeera](#) [2])

On August 18, 2020, the U.N.-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) reached a verdict in its trial in absentia of four men accused of orchestrating the 2005 Beirut bombing that killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others. The STL found Hezbollah member Salim Ayyash guilty of conspiracy aimed at committing a terrorist act, committing a terrorist act by means of an explosive device, and the intentional homicide of Rafik Hariri with premeditation by using explosive materials. Three other defendants were found not guilty. The STL did not find direct evidence that the leadership of Hezbollah or Syria played a role in orchestrating the bombing. Ayyash remains at large. (Source: [Special Tribunal for Lebanon](#) [3])

On December 19, 2019, Lebanese President Michel Aoun—a Hezbollah ally—appointed Hassan Diab as the country's new prime minister following extensive parliamentary negotiations to replace former Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Hariri resigned on October 29 following two weeks of countrywide anti-government protests. On January 22, 2020, Diab convened his new government, which included two Hezbollah ministers and members of Hezbollah-allied parties. On August 10, 2020, Diab dissolved the government after widespread anti-government protests. On August 31, Aoun designated Lebanon's ambassador to Germany, Mustapha Adib, as the country's new prime minister. Adib's attempts to quickly form a government were delayed by Hezbollah's demands for several ministries. (Sources: [*New York Times*](#) [4], [NBC News](#) [5], [Gulf News](#) [6], [Reuters](#) [7], [Reuters](#) [8], [Al Jazeera](#) [9], [*Wall Street Journal*](#) [10], [Al Jazeera](#) [11])

Overview

Decades of sectarian fighting in Lebanon have undermined Lebanese sovereignty and allowed global extremist groups to flourish in the country. The competing interests of Lebanon's Shiite, Sunni, and Christian populations—as well as Lebanon's large number of Palestinian refugees—have spurred significant political unrest, created multiple paths to radicalization, and allowed Hezbollah––a Shiite political party and terrorist group––to emerge as the main military and political power in the country. In addition, multiple terror groups, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1970s and al-Qaeda in the 2000s, have used Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps as safe havens.

Clashes between the PLO and Christian militias during the 1970s sparked Lebanon's 15-year civil war, which began in 1975. During the civil war, Hezbollah successfully established itself as an alternative to the fractured Lebanese government, providing social services to Lebanon's Shiite community while simultaneously launching violent attacks on American, French, and Israeli interests in Lebanon. The war also led to the decades-long occupation of Lebanon by both Syria and Israel. Though the civil war ended in 1990, Lebanon remains a highly sectarian nation and the fallout of the war continues to affect the Lebanese political sphere. (Source: [BBC News](#) [12])

Lebanon's government is largely divided between factions supporting the agendas of foreign powers. After Syria ended its occupation of Lebanon in 2005, pro- and anti-Syria alliances formed in Lebanon's parliament. Hezbollah and its pro-Syria March 8 alliance are backed by Iran and Syria itself, while Prime Minister Saad Hariri's Future party heads the anti-Syria March 14 alliance, which is backed by Saudi Arabia. Hezbollah has used its political influence to shape Lebanon's government and to collapse it when it acts contrary to the group's agenda. For example, in 2016, Hezbollah's political faction orchestrated the election of Lebanese President Michel Aoun, whose Free Patriotic Movement is allied with the terror group. Hariri also accuses Hezbollah and Syria of orchestrating the February 2005 assassination of his father, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. While on a trip to Saudi Arabia in November 2017, Hariri unexpectedly resigned as prime minister, accusing Hezbollah and Iran of destabilizing Lebanon. Iran and Saudi Arabia themselves also blamed each other for Lebanon's precarious political situation. However, Hariri returned to Lebanon and his post as prime minister a few weeks later. (Sources: [*Newsweek*](#) [13], [*New York Times*](#) [14], [Agence France-Presse](#) [15], [Al Jazeera](#) [16], [BBC News](#) [17])

Iran cultivated a fledgling Hezbollah with training, funding, and weaponry in the 1980s, and as the region's principal Shiite power, remains Hezbollah's primary backer and patron today. Consequently, as relations between Iran and the region's Sunni powers have deteriorated, relations between Lebanon and the region's Sunni powers have deteriorated as well. In

November 2017, Saudi Arabia accused Lebanon of declaring war because of Hezbollah's aggression in the region on behalf of Iran. Hezbollah has further involved Lebanon in regional conflicts with Israel and in the neighboring Syrian civil war, which have resulted in mass casualties and the destruction of Lebanese infrastructure. Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war in particular has made Lebanon a target for ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other Syrian rebel groups, which have carried out suicide bombings and other attacks on Lebanese cities and villages. (Source: Reuters [18])

Although the Lebanese government has successfully disrupted multiple terror networks in the country, including ISIS networks, Hezbollah's involvement in Lebanese politics prevents the Lebanese government from acting to counter Hezbollah itself. However, there have been international financial sanctions designed to curb Hezbollah's activity. The U.S. government alone has designated more than 100 Lebanese financial institutions, entities, and individuals linked to Hezbollah since 2001, and in 2015, passed specific legislation––the Hizbollah International Financing Prevention Act (HIPFA)––to target Lebanese banks linked to the group. (Sources: U.S. Department of State [19], U.S. Department of the Treasury [20], Reuters [21])

Hezbollah is overwhelmingly supported by Lebanon's Shiite population. As of 2014, public opinion polling showed that 86 percent of Lebanese Shiites held favorable views of Hezbollah. Although the group draws little support from Lebanese Sunnis, it also draws moderate support from Lebanese Christians, over half of whom supported Hezbollah's intervention in Syria and believed that the group was protecting Lebanon from ISIS as of 2014. The Lebanese population therefore remains divided along sectarian lines regarding Hezbollah and its involvement of Lebanon in the Syrian civil war, as well as its role in Lebanon itself. (Sources: Pew Research Center [22], Al-Akhbar English [23])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Radicalization

Lebanon's history of civil war, foreign occupation, and terrorism have created multiple paths toward radicalization in the country. Hezbollah has capitalized on political, religious, and social divisions to enhance its position while simultaneously functioning as part of and as an alternative to the government. Additionally, Hezbollah runs a network of schools and youth programs that aim to indoctrinate Lebanese youth in the group's ideology from a young age. Though Hezbollah is the largest and most organized extremist group operating in Lebanon, it is not the only source of radicalization in the country. Because Lebanese law limits the Lebanese army from acting in the country's 12 Palestinian refugee camps, these camps have become incubators for terrorist groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Fatah al-Islam, and the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. The U.S. Department of State has classified Lebanon as a safe haven for terrorism, and lists at least nine specific terrorist groups that use the refugee camps as "safe havens to house weapons, shelter wanted criminals, and plan terrorist attacks." (Sources: American University in Cairo [24], U.S. Department of State [25])

Ethnic and Religious Tensions

Lebanon is a deeply sectarian country with 18 officially recognized religious groups. In 1932, 11 years before Lebanon achieved statehood, Shiite Muslims comprised only 19.6 percent of the population. By 2017, Shiites made up approximately 27 percent of Lebanon's approximately 6.2 million population, according to CIA demographic data. Sunni Muslims made up another 27 percent, while Christians comprised 40.5 percent. Lebanese Shiites––as well as Hezbollah itself—are concentrated in Beirut's southern suburbs, the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, and southern Lebanon below the Litani River. According to June 2017 Israeli military estimates, Hezbollah has a military presence in 240 villages in southern Lebanon. (Sources: Brandeis University Crown Center for Middle East Studies [26], CIA [27], *Newsweek* [28])

Hezbollah and Iran have promoted the message that Shiites are an endangered minority outside of Iran, according to a 2016 interview with Subhi al-Tufayli, Hezbollah's first secretary-general. Tufayli has criticized Hezbollah––which he led from 1989 to 1991––for exploiting Lebanese sectarianism at Iran's behest, and accused Iran of "only investing in Lebanon's Shia to serve its own interests." While Hezbollah enjoys widespread support from the Lebanese Shiite community, dissent does exist. Sheikh Ali al-Amine, the Shiite mufti of the Jabal Amel district of south Lebanon and a former teacher of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [29], has criticized the group for seeking to "capture all the Shiite sect and push it into

the unknown." (Sources: *Christian Science Monitor* [30], Middle East Eye [31], *Arab Weekly* [32])

Sunni sectarianism has also resulted in violent protests against Hezbollah and the Lebanese state. In August 2014, Sunni clerics led protests against the Lebanese army's bombardment of the Lebanese border town of Arsal, which had been infiltrated by Sunni Syrian rebels. The militant Lebanese Sunni cleric Ahmad al-Assir has accused the Lebanese military of protecting Hezbollah. Throughout 2012 and 2013, Assir led protests against Hezbollah that drew thousands of Lebanese Sunnis. After the government accused him of inciting violence against the army, Lebanese security arrested Assir in 2015 as he was trying to escape the country. He was convicted, and sentenced to death by a Lebanese court in September 2017. (Sources: Al-Monitor [33], Reuters [34], Al-Monitor [35], Reuters [36], Agence France-Presse [37], Reuters [38], Reuters [34], Al-Monitor [35], Reuters [36], Agence France-Presse [37], *Guardian* [39], Reuters [40], Al-Monitor [41])

Palestinian Refugees and the PLO

Lebanon is host to approximately 450,000 Palestinian refugees. Though Palestinian refugees make up about 10 percent of the Lebanese population, the Lebanese government does not permit Palestinians to attain Lebanese citizenship or work in at least 20 professions, according to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). In 2001, the Lebanese parliament forbade Palestinians from owning property. According to UNRWA, 53 percent of the Palestinian population in Lebanon lives in the country's 12 registered refugee camps, which are subject to overcrowding, poor maintenance, and unemployment. Extremist groups have capitalized on Palestinian despair to breed radicalism and extract support. (Sources: UNRWA [42], Reuters [43], Human Rights Watch [44])

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its associated factions began using the Lebanese refugee camps as bases of operations as early as 1968. Though the PLO leadership at the time was based in Jordan, PLO guerillas carried out several cross-border attacks into Israel from Lebanon. After Jordan forced the PLO out of the country in September 1970, the PLO leadership fled to Lebanon. Approximately 150,000 Palestinian refugees also flooded into Lebanon from Jordan in the 1970s. The PLO conscripted young Palestinians within the refugee camps and turned public buildings into storehouses for weapons. The group also set up its own security checkpoints and assumed responsibility for the security of the camps. Lebanese police refused to confront PLO guerillas, and Lebanese businesses reported higher rates of armed robbery by Palestinians in the 1980s. (Sources: *New York Times* [45], BBC [46], *Christian Science Monitor* [47], *New York Times* [48])

On May 8, 1970, members of the PLO faction the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) crossed from Lebanon into Israel. On May 12, they attacked an Israeli school bus and killed 12 people––mostly children. Israel retaliated by shelling four Lebanese villages, killing 13. In May 1974, DFLP members again crossed into Israel from Lebanon and took 85 hostages at a school in Ma'alot, ultimately killing 26 and wounding more than 70 others. The attack resulted in an Israeli strike against seven Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon that killed 27. Palestinian attacks on Israel continued, and Palestinian guerillas also began to clash with Lebanese militant organizations that believed that the PLO was attempting to create its own state within Lebanon. These sectarian clashes between Palestinian guerillas and Christian Lebanese militants led to the Lebanese civil war in 1975. (Sources: *New York Times* [49], *New York Times* [50], *New York Times* [51], BBC [52], BBC [53], *New York Times* [54], *New York Times* [55], Times of Israel [56])

The PLO's attacks led to two Israeli invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982. By 1982, almost 15,000 PLO guerillas were based in Lebanon. Israeli forces invaded Lebanon on June 6, 1982, and forced the PLO into the western half of Beirut. On August 5, 1982, U.S. President Ronald Reagan called on the PLO to withdraw from Lebanon. By September 1, 1982, PLO forces had left Lebanon. Reagan praised the successful "evacuation" of the PLO as a "peaceful step." (Sources: United Nations [57], *New York Times* [58], *New York Times* [59], *New York Times* [60], *New York Times* [61], *New York Times* [62], *New York Times* [63])

Nonetheless, extremism and factional fighting have continued to flourish in the Palestinian refugee camps. Today, the main governing Palestinian body––the Palestinian Authority––and its main faction, Fatah, are responsible for security in Lebanon's refugee camps. Usbat al-Ansar (the League of Partisans) is a Sunni Palestinian militant group that formed in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps in the 1980s in opposition to the PLO and regional Arab powers. Iran and Hezbollah initially supported Usbat al-Ansar until the group severed ties after the 1991 assassination of its founder, Hisham Sharaydi. In 2002, Jund al-Sham (the Army of Greater Syria) formed in the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp as a splinter group from Usbat al-Ansar. Jund al-Sham is responsible for bombings around Lebanon, both in the refugee camps and in city centers. In May 2006, the group clashed with Fatah security forces in the Ain al-Hilweh camp, which the group attempted to take

over in 2015. In December 2016, UNRWA suspended its operations in the Ain al-Hilweh camp because of violence between Palestinian factions. In 2017, Jund al-Sham continued to challenge Fatah in multiple camps. (Sources: BBC News [64], Maan [65], *Washington Post* [66], U.S. Department of State [67], Al Jazeera [68], Al Jazeera [69], UNRWA [42], *Daily Star* [70])

An influx of Syrian Palestinian refugees has further swelled the camps' populations. By December 2016, Lebanon had received more than 56,000 new Palestinian refugees from Syria. (Sources: Maan [71], ReliefWeb [72])

The Lebanese Civil War

Lebanon's civil war began with armed clashes between the PLO and the Christian Phalange militia affiliated with Lebanon's Ḥizb al-Katā'ib al-Lubnānīya, a.k.a. Kataeb political party. In April 1975, the Christian Phalange movement alleged that Palestinian guerillas had attacked a church in the Beirut suburb of Ain el-Rammaneh and killed a bodyguard of Kataeb leader Pierre Gemayel. In retaliation, Phalangist gunmen attacked a bus carrying mostly Palestinian passengers, killing 27. Dubbed the Ain el-Rammaneh Incident, the attacks sparked a series of sectarian clashes and the beginning of Lebanon's 15-year civil war, which pitted Shiite, Sunni, and Christian militias against each other for control of Lebanon. The Lebanese civil war gave way to two major occupations of Lebanon by Israel and Syria. Though it officially ended in 1990, the civil war created divisions in Lebanon that have continued to affect Lebanese politics and security ever since. (Sources: BBC News [12], *New York Times* [73], *Daily Star* [74], BBC [75], Al-Monitor [76])

Hezbollah's origins are in the Lebanese civil war. The Amal Shiite political party, which was created in 1974, formed a militia that also fought in the war. Future Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah initially joined Amal in 1978, but broke away in 1982 to join a Shiite network being cultivated by Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini [77]. In 1982, this network formed the Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO), a precursor to Hezbollah. Under Iranian direction, the IJO claimed credit for the October 23, 1983, bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, which killed 241 U.S. service personnel, as well as the September 20, 1984, bombing of the U.S. embassy annex in Beirut, which killed 24. After receiving Khomeini's approval, Hezbollah officially announced its establishment in 1985, pledging allegiance to the Iranian supreme leader. (Sources: *New York Times* [78], U.S. Department of State [79], CNN [80], United Nations [81], BBC News [82], CNN [83], CNN [84], BBC News [12], *Guardian* [85], *Los Angeles Times* [86])

In 1976, the Lebanese army began to fragment. General Saad Hadad broke away from the main Lebanese army to form the South Lebanon Army (SLA). With Israeli funding and weaponry, the SLA fought against PLO and Shiite militants and began capturing territory in southern Lebanon. SLA fighters claimed loyalty to Lebanon and defended their actions in international media as protecting their villages from Palestinian and Shiite militias. On April 18, 1979, Hadad declared a nine-mile area of southern Lebanon controlled by his forces to be Independent Free Lebanon, which did not receive international recognition. Antoine Lahad took command of the SLA after Hadad's death on January 15, 1984. (Sources: *New York Times* [87], BBC News [88], BBC News [89], *Jerusalem Post* [90], *New York Times* [91], *Los Angeles Times* [92], *New York Times* [93], *Washington Post* [94])

The Lebanese civil war also gave way to two major occupations of the country that have continued to influence and divide Lebanese politics ever since. In June 1976, Syria entered Lebanon as part of an Arab peacekeeping mission. That October, the Arab League approved Syria's continued occupation of Lebanon in an endeavor to maintain peace between the warring factions. In addition to the Syrian occupation, Israel also occupied Lebanon twice during the civil war. On March 14, 1978, Israel launched Operation Litani, invading Lebanon to push back the PLO to north of the Litani River. The invasion was in response to an attack carried out in Israel three days prior known as the Coastal Road Massacre, in which PLO guerrillas murdered 38 people on a bus, as well as to recent the shelling of northern Israel by the PLO and other Palestinian groups. After Israeli forces, aided by Phalangist militants, blockaded Beirut in order to drive out the PLO that summer, the United Nations enacted a ceasefire and created the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to monitor Israel's withdrawal. However, on June 6, 1982, Israel again invaded Lebanon in response to Palestinian guerilla attacks and the attempted assassination of Israel's ambassador to the United Kingdom. (Sources: BBC News [12], *New York Times* [95], ABC News [45], BBC News [12], United Nations [57], *Jerusalem Post* [96], *New York Times* [97], *New York Times* [98], Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs [99])

In 1985, Israel mostly withdrew from Lebanon but established a security zone in the south of the country in coordination with the SLA in order to prevent attacks into its territory. The SLA acted as an Israeli proxy and continued to violently

clash with Hezbollah and other Islamic militias in Lebanon during and after the civil war. (Sources: *New York Times* [100], BBC News [89], *New York Times* [93])

In September 1989, Lebanese parliamentarians met in Taif, Saudi Arabia, and negotiated the Taif Agreement to end the civil war. The contentious negotiations resulted in widespread protests in Lebanon as various factions decried any loss of power. The agreement reorganized the government to allow it to extend its authority over the entirety of the country and called for the disarmament of all militias in the country and the withdrawal of Israeli forces. The agreement also affirmed the "special relationship" between Lebanon and Syria and called for neither country to harm the security of the other. (Sources: United Nations [101], *New York Times* [102], *New York Times* [103], *New York Times* [104], *New York Times* [95])

Despite the Taif Agreement, neither Israel nor Syria withdrew their forces from Lebanon. Israel argued that its security zone was necessary to prevent militant attacks across the border, while Syria argued that its forces balanced the Israeli occupation and maintained security in Lebanon. In 1992, Lebanon held its first free elections since before the start of the war. Hezbollah and Amal both entered Lebanese politics during these elections, and Amal leader Nabih Berri has remained Lebanon's parliamentary speaker since 1992. Nonetheless, Amal occasionally joined Hezbollah in attacks against Israeli forces and SLA positions throughout the 1990s, which often drew deadly responses. (Sources: CNN [105], CNN [106], Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [107], BBC News [108], *Guardian* [109], Lebanese Republic National Assembly [110])

In 1999, newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak pledged to withdraw his country from Lebanon by July 2000. SLA militiamen sought asylum in Israel out of fear that Hezbollah would slaughter them without Israeli protection. The SLA began withdrawing from its own positions north of the Israeli security zone. In June 1999, Hezbollah attacked SLA and Israeli soldiers after the SLA withdrew from around the village of Jezzine. Israel completed its withdrawal on May 23, 2000. The next morning, Hezbollah forces entered the Lebanese town of Marjayoun, the former base of the SLA. Hezbollah tore down a statue of SLA founder Hadad and ransacked the homes of SLA leaders. More than 3,000 SLA members fled into Israel, while several hundred turned themselves over to Lebanese authorities to avoid Hezbollah retaliation. (Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [111], *Los Angeles Times* [112], *Los Angeles Times* [113], BBC News [88], *New York Times* [93])

Immediately following the Israeli withdrawal, Hezbollah fighters took control of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah set up medical clinics, architectural firms, and other social services to fill the vacuum left by the Israeli withdrawal and the Lebanese state's inability to extend its own control. As a result, Hezbollah built grassroots support in southern Lebanon that allowed it to continue to grow militarily and maintain a qualitative military edge over the Lebanese Armed Forces. Calls for Syria's withdrawal grew stronger in Lebanon following Israel's withdrawal. (Sources: BBC News [12], *New York Times* [95], ABC News [45], *New York Times* [114])

Hezbollah

The Shiite terrorist group Hezbollah [115] ("the Party of God") emerged in Lebanon in 1982. Its ideology was modeled on Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1979 Iranian revolution. Iran viewed Hezbollah as an opportunity to extend its influence and cultivated the group with funding, training, and weaponry through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [116] (IRGC). Hezbollah was officially founded in February 1985, when it pledged loyalty to Khomeini, demanded the expulsion of foreign forces from Lebanon, called for Israel's destruction, and called for the creation of an Islamic state in Lebanon. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Hezbollah led a guerilla campaign against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon during Israel's 18-year occupation. (Sources: BBC News [117], *Atlantic* [118], CIA [119], *Arab Weekly* [32], CIA [119], Al-Akbar English [120], Frontline [121], United Nations [81], BBC News [82], CNN [83], CNN [84])

Hezbollah and its Loyalty to the Resistance political bloc first entered Lebanon's parliament in the Lebanese elections of 1992, which were the country's first free elections since 1972. Hezbollah has maintained a political presence in the Lebanese government ever since. Though it has not yet won a mandate to lead the Lebanese government, Hezbollah and its March 8 parliamentary alliance are strong enough to ensure representation in Lebanese coalition governments. In 2009, for example, the opposing Future movement and its anti-Syrian March 14 alliance won a plurality in Lebanon's parliamentary elections, but the political reality forced Future to include Hezbollah in the formation of a unity government. Hezbollah then collapsed the unity government two years later by resigning from it. (Sources: United Press International [122], Council on Foreign Relations [123], Reuters [124], Reuters [125], Reuters [126])

After former Lebanese President Michel Suleiman's term ended in May 2014, Hezbollah blocked the parliament from electing a new president for two years until it could guarantee the election of its political ally Michel Aoun, whom Nasrallah called Hezbollah's "natural candidate." In October 2016, Lebanon's political parties acceded to Hezbollah's demands in a power-sharing agreement that led to Aoun's election as president and the appointment of Saad Hariri of the anti-Syria Future party as prime minister. Aoun publicly thanked Nasrallah and Hezbollah for aiding his election. Lebanon held parliamentary elections in May 2018 for the first time since 2009. Hezbollah and its political allies won 70 seats in Lebanon's 128-seat parliament and then delayed the formation of a new governing coalition for eight months to ensure an influential position in the new government. On January 31, 2019, Lebanese leaders announced a new government that awarded Hezbollah control over Lebanon's health ministry, which has the fourth-largest budget of any government ministry and gave Hezbollah a larger sphere of influence over Lebanese daily life. (Sources: Reuters [127], Ya Libnan [128], *Daily Star [129]*, *Jerusalem Post [130]*, *Daily Star [131]*, *Daily Star [132]*, Al Jazeera [133], Reuters [134], *Daily Star [135]*, Al-Monitor [135], Associated Press [136], U.S. Department of State [137], Reuters [138], Reuters [139])

On October 29, 2019, Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned after two weeks of anti-government protests that began after his government proposed a 20 percent tax on phone calls using the messaging app WhatsApp. Thousands of Lebanese called for the resignation of the government and the entire ruling political class. At one point during the protests, Hezbollah supporters attacked protesters, claiming they would not allow criticism of Nasrallah, who accused foreign powers of supporting the protests. Protesters praised Hariri's resignation but vowed to remain until all of their demands were met. (Sources: *Forbes [140]*, *New York Times [141]*, CNN [142], Bloomberg [143], Al Jazeera [144])

Hezbollah is able to maintain a strong base of support and continually gain recruits by targeting Lebanese youth. Hezbollah runs networks of schools, camps, and religious programs throughout Lebanon, and even has a youth wing called the "Mahdi Scouts"––similar in organization to the American Boy Scouts––that seeks to indoctrinate youth in the group's ideology. From a very young age, Lebanese youth are therefore introduced to anti-Israel sentiments and inculcated with the notion that Hezbollah is an important patron of Lebanese society. Hezbollah recruiters also travel across Lebanon, where they seek out candidates with the desired values of piety and modesty and cultivate relationships with potential recruits, who then begin a regiment of religious education and undergo basic military training. (Sources: *New York Times* [145], CNN [146], American University in Cairo [24], *Cairo Review of Global Affairs* [147])

As the strongest military power in Lebanon, Hezbollah has also instigated deadly conflicts, including the 2006 war against Israel. In July 2006, Hezbollah launched a cross-border attack into Israel, killing eight Israeli soldiers and capturing two others. In response, Israel launched a 34-day war that devastated Lebanon's civilian population. The war destroyed 130,000 Lebanese homes, leaving tens of thousands of people homeless. More than 1,100 Lebanese people—the majority of whom were civilians—died in the conflict. International NGOs such as Human Rights Watch reported a "handful of instances" of Hezbollah using Lebanese civilians as human shields. U.N. humanitarian relief coordinator Jan Egeland accused Hezbollah of "cowardly blending" among Lebanese civilians and of being "proud because they lost very few fighters and that it was the civilians bearing the brunt of this." The war ended with U.N. Resolution 1701, which reaffirmed previous resolutions demanding Hezbollah's disarmament and charged UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces with ensuring that no unauthorized weapons are present in southern Lebanon. (Sources: *Washington Post* [148], *New York Times* [149], BBC News [150], Human Rights Watch [151], U.N. Security Council [152], Associated Press [153])

Hezbollah has at times also turned its weapons against the Lebanese state. In May 2008, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora banned Hezbollah's private telecommunications network. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah called the move an act of war, and Hezbollah responded by launching weeks of violent clashes in and around Beirut, capturing sections of the city and attacking media offices affiliated with the ruling Future movement. The Lebanese government labeled Hezbollah's actions as an attempted coup. The fighting ended with a Qatari-negotiated agreement that brought Hezbollah into a unity government and gave it veto power. Lebanese international law researcher Yara Saab described the conflict to BBC News as a "prime indication" of Hezbollah's "readiness to use violence in order to achieve political gains." (Sources: BBC News [154], BBC News [155], Reuters [156])

Hezbollah has also lent its support to Syria in the country's civil war. In August 2012, the U.S. government sanctioned Hezbollah for its support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and said that Hezbollah has "directly trained Syrian Government personnel inside Syria" and "facilitated the training of Syrian forces by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps." The United States also accused Hezbollah of playing "a substantial role in efforts to expel Syrian opposition forces from areas within Syria." (Source: U.S. Department of State [157])

Hezbollah's campaign in Syria has spilled over into Lebanon. The group has clashed with the [Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham)](#) [158], ISIS, and other rebel forces within Lebanon's borders. In June 2013, Syrian rebels fired 18 rockets and mortars into eastern Lebanon. A Hezbollah member and 17 Nusra Front fighters were reportedly killed in ensuing battles inside Lebanon. In May 2015, Hezbollah and Nusra Front fighters fought in eastern Lebanon, about 30 miles from the Syrian border. Anti-Syrian militant groups have also set off suicide bombs in Hezbollah strongholds in southern and eastern Lebanon, which have killed Lebanese civilians. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [159], [Associated Press](#) [160], [Al Jazeera](#) [161], [CNN](#) [162])

Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian war has inflamed Lebanon's own sectarian divisions. In 2012, Lebanese Sunni militants armed with black-market weapons began clashing with militias comprised of Lebanese Alawite supporters of Assad. In 2013, Sunni militias took control of portions of the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli and executed Alawite civilians in the street. Bassem Shabb, a Lebanese parliamentarian of the anti-Syrian Future movement, warned in 2014 that the Syrian civil war threatened lasting peace in Lebanon. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [163], [Deutsche Welle](#) [164], [Reuters](#) [165])

During the summer of 2017, Hezbollah fought a major ground offensive to push Syrian rebel forces away from the Lebanese border. The Lebanese army reportedly played a supporting role, which Hezbollah credited as contributing to its eventual victory. Hezbollah and the Syrian army fought against the Nusra Front in the Lebanese-Syrian border area, eventually expelling the group from the mountainous Lebanese territory of Jund Arsal. In September 2017, Hezbollah declared victory in the Syrian war. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [166], [Agence France-Presse](#) [167], *[Daily Star](#)* [168], [Reuters](#) [169])

In addition to its involvement in Syria, Hezbollah is also suspected of aiding Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen's civil war. In December 2017, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri condemned Hezbollah's involvement in foreign conflicts: "Lebanon can no longer tolerate the interferences of a party like Hezbollah in the affairs of the Gulf countries…. We must not pay for the actions of Hezbollah." Also that month, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir declared that Lebanon had been "hijacked" and would "only survive or prosper if you disarm Hezbollah." (Sources: [Reuters](#) [170], [Associated Press](#) [171])

The U.S. government has passed a number of sanctions on Lebanese businesses and individuals tied to Hezbollah. In December 2015, the U.S. government passed the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA) of 2015. The legislation makes disrupting Hezbollah's financial and logistics networks a U.S. policy goal by utilizing "diplomatic, legislative, and executive avenues to combat Hizballah's criminal activities in order to block that organization's ability to fund its global terrorist activities." The legislation threatens sanctions on any financial institution that deals with Hezbollah or its Al-Manar media arm. Lebanese lawmakers have sought to lobby Congress to loosen sanctions against Hezbollah because of the threat to Lebanon's economy. Hariri has argued that sanctions on financial institutions linked to Hezbollah would increase economic hardships for Lebanese citizens. The U.S. government passed the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act in October 2018, targeting government agencies and foreign persons that knowingly support the terror group. In July 2019, the United States for the first time sanctioned two Lebanese legislators affiliated with Hezbollah. (Sources: [Congress.gov](#) [172], [Al-Monitor](#) [173], [CNN](#) [174], [Associated Press](#) [175])

Hariri and Saudi Arabia have also accused Iran of attempting to use Hezbollah to influence the Lebanese government and "kidnap" Lebanon from the Arab world. In December 2017, the Arab League issued a statement accusing Hezbollah of terrorism and denouncing Iranian interference in Arab countries. Lebanese President Michel Aoun defended Hezbollah as necessary to Lebanon's defense. Iran and Hezbollah insisted that Saudi Arabia had pushed Hariri's 2017 resignation in order to damage Hezbollah, though Saudi Arabia and Hariri both denied the charge. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [176], [Reuters](#) [177], [Reuters](#) [178], [Reuters](#) [179])

On October 17, 2019, thousands of Lebanese citizens staged anti-government protests across Lebanon after the government proposed a 20 percent tax on phone calls using the messaging app WhatsApp. The government quickly abandoned the plan, but protests continued, accusing the government of widespread corruption and calling for the resignation of the entire ruling political class. On October 28, Hezbollah supporters reportedly attacked protesters in Beirut. Security forces responded with rubber bullets and tear gas. Hariri resigned on October 29 after two weeks of protests, but protesters vowed to remain until all their demands were met. On November 24, Lebanese security forces fired tear gas amid confrontations in central Beirut between supporters of Hezbollah and Amal. The violence began when

supporters of Hezbollah and the other main Shiite faction, Amal, attacked protesters who had blocked a main Beirut thoroughfare known as the Ring Road—a move the protesters said was aimed at exerting pressure on politicians to form a new government. (Sources: *Forbes* [140], *New York Times* [141], CNN [142], Al Jazeera [144], Huffington Post [180])

On December 19, 2019, Aoun appointed university professor Hassan Diab as the country's new prime minister following extensive parliamentary negotiations. On January 22, 2020, Diab convened his new government, which included two Hezbollah ministers and members of Hezbollah-allied parties. Hezbollah received the portfolios for the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Industry. Hariri's Future Movement and other pro-Western parties remained outside of the cabinet, drawing international concern that Hezbollah's agenda would dominate Lebanon's new cabinet. (Sources: *New York Times* *[4]*, NBC News [5], Gulf News [6], Reuters [7])

Despite the formation of the new government, protests continued across the country as it grappled with a national quarantine amid the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020. Lebanon declared a state of emergency on March 16 and ordered a two-week nationwide lockdown. Throughout March, protesters broke curfews to protest the government's failure to provide financial aid to businesses that have closed as a result of the lockdown, which exacerbated Lebanon's financial crisis. Prison riots also erupted as prisoners protested overcrowding and health conditions. Hezbollah deployed hundreds of doctors, nurses, and paramedics throughout Lebanon to combat the outbreak. Pro-reform Lebanese protesters expressed concern that Hezbollah would use the health crisis to further consolidate power in the government. (Sources: Middle East Monitor [181], Middle East Monitor [182], Middle East Monitor [183], Reuters [184], Voice of America [185])

On August 4, 2020, an explosion in Beirut's port killed at least 200 people, wounded more than 6,000 others, and destroyed much of the port. Lebanese officials suspect the explosion was caused by negligence in the storage of the explosive fertilizer chemical ammonium nitrate but did not immediately rule out the possibility of terrorism. Suspicion also fell upon Hezbollah, which allegedly used multiple buildings in the port for illegal drug smuggling and other criminal activities. Hezbollah reportedly controls buildings in the port housing weapons and fireworks and some regional intelligence officials suspect a fire at one of the Hezbollah warehouses sparked the explosions. Hezbollah had previously threatened to target ammonium nitrate storage facilities at Israel's ports. Hezbollah had also reportedly sought to use Lebanon's agricultural ministry to import ammonium nitrate into Lebanon from Syria. Anti-government protests spread across Beirut the weekend after the blast, leading two government ministers and seven members of parliament to resign. On August 10, Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab dissolved the government after attributing the explosion to widespread corruption. On August 31, Aoun designated Lebanon's ambassador to Germany, Mustapha Adib, as the country's new prime minister after Adib received the backing of several former prime ministers, including Hariri. Adib's attempts to quickly form a government were delayed by Hezbollah's demands for several ministries. (Sources: *New York Times* [186], Associated Press [187], Fox News [188], *Jerusalem Post* [189], Reuters [8], Al Jazeera [9], *Wall Street Journal* [10], Al Jazeera [11])

Hamas

The Palestinian terrorist group Hamas maintains a representative inside Lebanon who supports the group's ties to the Lebanese government and Hezbollah. For example, in July 2017, Hamas's representative, Ali Barakah, met with Lebanese President Michel Aoun to hand-deliver a letter from Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh. That November, senior Hamas official Musa Abu Marzouk told media that Hamas and Hezbollah have "ongoing contacts and understandings" and "coordinate our positions regarding the Palestinian cause." In March 2017, a Hamas delegation met with Aoun and other Lebanese leaders in Beirut to discuss Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Hamas's support for Lebanese unity. The following month, a Hamas representative met with Ayman Shqeir, Lebanon's human rights minister and a member of the Hezbollah-aligned Progressive Socialist Party, in Lebanon. Jerusalem-based journalist Khaled Abu Toameh, who has covered Hamas and Palestinian affairs for the *Jerusalem Post* and Gatestone Institute, believes that Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran are looking to create a unified front. Hamas and Hezbollah leaders have maintained open relations and continue to meet on occasion inside Lebanon. (Sources: Hamas website [190], Hamas website [191], Hamas website [192], Al-Quds Al-Arabi [193], Gatestone Institute [194], Al Jazeera [195])

ISIS

ISIS has created an active recruitment network in Lebanon, which has resulted in attacks on Hezbollah strongholds within

the country. On November 12, 2015, twin suicide bombings in Beirut's Bourj al-Barajneh district—a known Hezbollah stronghold—killed 44 and wounded 239. Within 48 hours, Lebanese security forces arrested 11 people—mostly Syrians and two Lebanese—suspected of organizing the bombings and smuggling the bombers across the border from Syria. On November 17, 2017, Lebanese authorities arrested a Syrian network that had been planning attacks within Lebanon on behalf of ISIS. Lebanese security services have arrested multiple ISIS agents in Lebanon, including two high-level ISIS figures in September and November 2016, according to the U.S. State Department. The U.S. State Department also credits the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with disrupting a 2016 ISIS plot against Western targets in and around Beirut. (Sources: U.S. Department of State [19], *Daily Star* [196], Australian Broadcasting Corporation [197])

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda [198] recruits in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps. In the 2000s, Lebanese Sunnis began to become radicalized by al-Qaeda ideology, giving rise to several al-Qaeda-inspired groups. The Abdullah Azzam Brigades, al-Qaeda's Lebanese branch, which also operates in the Arabian Peninsula, formed in 2009. The group has launched numerous rockets into Israel from Lebanon and threatened to kidnap U.S. and British tourists across the Middle East. The Brigades claimed a November 19, 2013, double suicide bombing outside of the Iranian embassy in Beirut that killed 23 people, including Iranian cultural attaché Sheikh Ibrahim al-Ansari. The Brigades demanded that Iranian forces leave Syria. (Sources: *Time* [199], BBC News [200], *Guardian* [201], Reuters [202], U.S. Department of State [203])

Fatah al-Islam formed in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in 2006 after breaking away from the Syrian-backed Fatah al-Intifada. Led by Shakir al-Abssi, who previously belonged to al-Qaeda, Fatah al-Islam carried out numerous bombings targeting the Lebanese military. Abssi told Reuters that his group's goal was to institute sharia (Islamic law) in the Palestinian refugee camps and then confront Israel. Lebanese officials have accused Fatah al-Islam of links to al-Qaeda, although the group denies any official ties. Nonetheless, Abssi was convicted and sentenced to death in absentia alongside deceased al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi [204] in the 2002 assassination of U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley in Jordan. In 2007, Abssi told the *New York Times* that America needs to be punished for its interference in the Islamic world. (Sources: *New York Times* [205], *New York Times* [206], Reuters [207], NPR [208], NPR [209], Reuters [210], Reuters [211])

Members of Fatah al-Islam claimed responsibility for two February 2007 bus bombings in Beirut that killed three people. In May 2007, the Lebanese army began a 15-week campaign against Fatah al-Islam in the refugee camps, which ended when the army captured the Nahr al-Bared camp from Fatah al-Islam that September. The fighting displaced 27,000 Palestinians and reportedly destroyed 95 percent of the camp. It also resulted in the deaths of 170 soldiers, 220 militants, and at least 42 non-combatants. In January 2008, Abssi threatened revenge against Lebanese forces. The group has since remained active in Syria. (Sources: BBC News [212], *New York Times* [205], BBC News [213], Al-Monitor [214], Reuters [207], Reuters [215], Reuters [216], *Foreign Policy* [217])

Syrian Refugees

Lebanon is host to more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees who fled the neighboring civil war. Anti-refugee attitudes have increasingly led to violence. Because Lebanon has no official Syrian refugee camps, the refugees are spread throughout the country. According to the United Nations, more than 70 percent live below the poverty line. Lebanese citizens and communal leaders have increasingly called for the refugees to return to Syria amid accusations that they are a drain on Lebanon's economy. Online petitions calling for Syrian refugees to leave Lebanon have garnered thousands of signatures. In July 2017, Patriarch Beshara al-Rai, head of Lebanon's Maronite Christian church, accused Syrian refugees of "snatching (the Lebanese people's) daily bread from their mouths, throwing them into a state of poverty and deprivation." Refugees have reported their fear of harassment and arrest, as well as direct threats of violence. According to the International Rescue Committee, one in four Syrian children have experienced violence in Lebanon. In July 2017, a cellphone video calling for violence against Syrians spread across multiple social-media platforms. Shortly after, a group of Lebanese men physically assaulted a refugee. That October, Lebanese President Michel Aoun called for Syrian refugees to return home as Lebanon "cannot handle it anymore." (Sources: Al Jazeera [218], Al Jazeera [219], Reuters [220], U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees [221], NPR [222], *Guardian* [223], BBC News [224], Reuters [225])

Foreign Fighters

By September 2015, 900 Lebanese citizens had joined the conflicts in Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters, according to a December 2015 report by The Soufan Group. These numbers do not include Lebanese Hezbollah fighters involved in the Syrian civil war. In August 2015, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told media that his government had invited Hezbollah's aid in the civil war. By January 2016, there were reportedly between 7,000 and 9,000 Hezbollah fighters in Syria, and by the end of 2016, at least 2,000 Hezbollah fighters had reportedly been killed in the Syrian civil war. (Sources: Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty [226], The Soufan Group [227], Al Jazeera [228], YNet News [229], Al-Monitor [230], *New Yorker* [231])

Iran and Hezbollah have also made Lebanon a destination for foreign fighters. In 1982, Iran sent 1,000 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) soldiers to Lebanon to train and equip the fledgling Hezbollah. During the Syrian war, hundreds of Sunni militants allied with ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other groups have entered Lebanon to fight against Hezbollah. These militants have reportedly hidden within Palestinian refugee camps, where they have violently clashed with Lebanese forces. For example, the al-Qaeda-inspired Fatah al-Islam, which includes Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian fighters, rose to prominence in 2007 by fighting the Lebanese army from its base at one of the camps. In September 2015 and again in April 2016, members of the secular Palestinian faction Fatah clashed with members of the al-Qaeda-linked Jund al-Sham in the Ain al-Hilweh camp. In June 2017, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah declared that a new war with Israel could draw an influx of "hundreds of thousands" of foreign fighters into Lebanon to fight alongside Hezbollah. Lebanese Forces chief Samir Geagea condemned Nasrallah's statement, saying that "it is not up to anybody to open Lebanese borders [for foreign fighters], even the Lebanese Cabinet." (Sources: Frontline [121], *The National* [232], *Daily Star* [233], Reuters [234], Reuters [235], Brookings Institution [236], Council on Foreign Relations [237], BBC News [213], *New York Times* [205], Maan [65], Al-Monitor [238])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Since declaring independence from France in 1943, Lebanon has been besieged by terrorism and extremism. According to the United Kingdom's travel warning for Lebanon, "terrorists are likely to try to carry out attacks" in the country. (Sources: Gov.UK [239], BBC News [12])

2004-2008 Bombings and Assassinations

A series of 25 bombings carried out between 2004 and 2008 resulted in multiple high-profile political and security assassinations. The bombing campaign began after the September 2004 parliamentary decision to extend the term of pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud by three years. Between October 2004 and October 2005, 13 bombings killed at least 38 people. The Syrian opposition in Lebanon blamed many of the bombings on pro-Syrian supporters, alleging that they were purposefully inciting violence in an attempt to demonstrate that a continued Syrian occupation in Lebanon was necessary to maintain law and order. On February 14, 2005, a car bomb killed anti-Syrian former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others in Beirut. Hezbollah was suspected of involvement in the attack, which led to the Cedar Revolution and the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. Hezbollah denies participation in the attack. (Sources: BBC News [240], BBC News [241], *Daily Star* [242], *Guardian* [243], *New York Times* [244], *Telegraph* [245])

On June 30, 2011, the U.N.-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) indicted four men—Hassan Anaissy, Assad Sabra, and suspected Hezbollah members Mustafa Badreddine and Salim Ayyash—for the 2005 Beirut bombing that killed Hariri and 21 others. In February 2012, the STL agreed to try the four in absentia. Suspected mastermind Badreddine died in 2016 while fighting in Syria and the STL chose not to pursue the criminal case against him after his death. Municipal officials in Beirut created a domestic controversy in 2018 when they named a street after Badreddine. The street itself led to Rafik Hariri Hospital. In October 2013, the STL filed charges against suspected Hezbollah member Hassan Habib Merhi and subsequently added him in absentia to the trial of Anaissy, Sabra, and Ayyash. On August 4, 2020, an explosion in Beirut's port killed at least 135 people, wounded more than 5,000 others, and destroyed much of the port. In response, the STL delayed handing down its verdict, which had originally been scheduled for August 7. On August 18, the STL released its verdict finding Ayyash guilty of all counts. The STL found Merhi, Anaissy, and Sabra not guilty. The STL did not find direct evidence that the leadership of Hezbollah or Syria played a role in orchestrating the bombing. Ayyash remains at large. (Sources: *New York Times* [244], Agence France-Presse [246], Special Tribunal for Lebanon [247], BBC News [248],

Special Tribunal for Lebanon [249], Deutsche Welle [250], *New York Times* [186], Special Tribunal for Lebanon [251], Special Tribunal for Lebanon [3])

Political Assassinations

Lebanon has had a history of political assassinations dating back to the 1951 assassination of the country's first prime minister, Riad Solh, after he had left office. Mikail el-Dib, a Lebanese, and Mohammed Adib es-Salah, a Palestinian, shot and killed Solh in his car on his way to the airport after meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah in Aman. On June 16, 1976, members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine kidnapped and shot to death U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Francis E. Meloy, his economic counselor, Robert O. Waring, and their Lebanese driver, Zoheir Moghrabi. On September 4, 1981, four gunmen shot and killed Louis Delamare, the French ambassador to Lebanon. On September 14, 1982, a bomb outside the Beirut headquarters of the Kataeb Christian political party killed Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel and 32 others. Hezbollah is suspected of having carried out the February 14, 2005, car bombing that killed former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. On January 25, 2008, Captain Wissam Eid, Lebanon's chief terrorism investigator, was also killed in a car bombing. Eid had been investigating Hezbollah's involvement in the assassination of Hariri. Most recently, on November 3, 2017, Prime Minister Saad Hariri alleged that Hezbollah had attempted to assassinate him a few days earlier. (Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [252], *New York Times* [253], Al-Monitor [254], *Daily Star* [255], *New York Times* [256], *New York Times* [257], *New York Times* [258], *Daily Star* [259], *Guardian* [243], *Guardian* [260], *Los Angeles Times* [261], Associated Press [262])

Hezbollah's 2008 Coup Attempt

In late April 2008, Lebanese security forces reportedly discovered a remote-controlled Hezbollah camera at Beirut's international airport. On May 3, the Lebanese government accused Hezbollah of spying on planes at the airport in preparation for an attack. On May 6, the government sought to dismantle Hezbollah's private telecommunications network. On May 8, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah called the network integral to his group's fight against Israel and called the government's attempt to dismantle it a declaration of war. Shortly after Nasrallah's speech, gun battles erupted between Hezbollah fighters and Sunni pro-government supporters. Hezbollah fighters captured sections of western Beirut, set fire to a newspaper officer affiliated with the governing Future movement, and shut down the Future movement's affiliated television station. Fighting also erupted in Sidon and the Bekaa Valley. The clashes left 65 people dead across the country. The Lebanese government called Hezbollah's actions "an armed and bloody coup," while media reported the conflict as the worst sectarian fighting in Lebanon since the end of its civil war. (Sources: BBC News [263], BBC News [264], CNN [265], Reuters [266], YNet News [267], *New York Times* [268], *New York Times* [269], BBC News [270])

On May 21, Hezbollah and the Lebanese government concluded several days of Qatari mediation with the announcement of the Doha Agreement. The accord brought Hezbollah's political party into a national-unity government and gave it veto power in a new cabinet. The agreement also resulted in the election of army chief General Michel Suleiman as Lebanon's president and called for a new election law that divides Lebanon into smaller electoral districts. Hezbollah's critics argued that the agreement rewarded the terror group for violence against the Lebanese state. (Sources: *New York Times* [271], Reuters [156], BBC News [154])

2006 Hezbollah-Israel War

On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah launched a cross-border raid into northern Israel, killing eight Israeli soldiers and capturing two others. On July 13, Israel and Hezbollah began a 34-day war, during which Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets, supplied by Iran, into Israeli territory. During the course of the war, Hezbollah killed 40 Israeli civilians and 119 soldiers, while Israel killed more than 1,100 Lebanese—most of whom were reportedly civilians. Multiple NGOs reported that Hezbollah deployed their weapons from civilian areas in Lebanon and used Lebanese civilians as human shields. (Sources: CNN [272], BBC News [150], *Washington Post* [273], Center for Strategic and International Studies [274])

The U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1701 on August 11, 2006, calling for the immediate cessation of attacks by both Hezbollah and Israel. The resolution reaffirmed previous calls for Hezbollah to disarm and expanded UNIFIL's mandate to ensure that southern Lebanon is free of all unauthorized weapons. The resolution also charged the Lebanese Armed Forces with the responsibility of aiding UNIFIL. (Sources: *New York Times* [149], United Nations [152], *Newsweek*

[275], [Times of Israel](#) [276])

- **November 26, 2019:**Ali Kourani, a U.S. citizen and New York resident who spied for Hezbollah, is sentenced to 40 years in federal prison.
  Kourani was recruited, trained, and deployed by Hezbollah to plan and execute acts of terrorism around New York City. After spending years conducting surveillance on the city's critical infrastructure, federal buildings, international airports, and even daycare centers, he is now the first Islamic Jihad Organization operative to be convicted and sentenced for his crimes against the United States. Source: [NBC News](#) [277]
- **November 24, 2019:**Security forces fire tear gas amid confrontations in central Beirut between supporters of Hezbollah and Amal.
  The violence began when supporters of Hezbollah and the other main Shiite faction, Amal, attacked protesters who had blocked a main Beirut thoroughfare known as the Ring Road—a move the protesters said was aimed at exerting pressure on politicians to form a new government after Prime Minister Saad Hariri offered his resignation October 29. The overnight violence gave a preview into a worst-case scenario for Lebanon's crisis, with the country's U.S.-trained military increasingly in the middle between pro- and anti-Hezbollah factions. Source: [Huffington Post](#) [180]
- **October 31, 2019:**Hezbollah fires an anti-aircraft missile at an Israeli drone flying over Nabatieh in southern Lebanon.
  The Israel Defense Forces denied Hezbollah's claim that the aircraft had been shot down over the Lebanese village of Nabatieh. Footage from Nabatieh that was shared on social media appeared to show an anti-aircraft missile being fired into the air. An explosion was also heard in the area, residents told local media. The exchange occurred amid heightened tensions between Israel and Iran, and amid a rapidly deteriorating political situation in Lebanon, where nearly two weeks of nonstop protests have paralyzed the country. Source: [Times of Israel](#) [278]
- **October 2019:**Hezbollah supporters attack anti-government protesters in Beirut calling for the government's resignation.
  The Hezbollah supporters throw rocks and proclaim they will not allow criticism of Nasrallah, who accused foreign powers of supporting the protests. After two weeks of protests, Hariri resigns on October 29. Sources: [CNN](#) [142], [Bloomberg](#) [143], [Al Jazeera](#) [144]
- **September 1, 2019 - September 2, 2019:**On September 1, Hezbollah fires rockets at a military base and ambulance in Israel after an alleged Israeli drone strike in Lebanon, for which the Israeli military denies responsibility.
  Israel returns fire at Hezbollah positions. There are no reported casualties on either side. Hezbollah claims the attack is in response to an Israeli strike on Iran-backed forces in Syria the week before. Hariri declares that the Lebanese government is not responsible for the rockets on Israel and Hezbollah is not just Lebanon's problem but a regional problem. Sources: [CNBC](#) [279], [*Washington Post*](#) *[280]*, [Jewish News Syndicate](#) [281]
- **June 3, 2019:**A gunman attacks a bank, a police station, and an army vehicle in Tripoli, killing four members of the security forces before exploding a suicide vest.
  The gunman is identified as Abdul Rahman Mabsout, who had briefly been detained upon his return from Syria in 2016. ISIS is suspected but there are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [BBC News](#) [282]
- **December 2018 - January 2019:**Israeli forces discover six underground tunnels built by Hezbollah from Lebanon into Israel.
  The tunnels are destroyed. Sources: [NBC News](#) [283], [NBC News](#) [284]
- **August 2018:**A group of about 20 suspected Hezbollah militants ambush a UNIFIL patrol convoy in the village of Majdal Zun about five miles from the Lebanese-Israeli border, smashing windows and lighting one of the cars on fire.
  The convoy was attacked allegedly because the peacekeepers were taking pictures. There are no injuries reported. UNIFIL says the Lebanese military failed to identify the attackers but U.S. sources suspect Hezbollah. Source: [Fox News](#) [285]
- **November 2017:**On November 3, Prime Minister Saad Hariri flees to Saudi Arabia.
  The following day, he announces his resignation, accusing Hezbollah and Iran of destabilizing Lebanon and alleging that Hezbollah attempted to assassinate him a few days earlier. Hezbollah rejects the claim and accuses Saudi Arabia of directing Hariri to resign in order to weaken Hezbollah. Hariri returns to Lebanon on November 22 and rescinds his resignation. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [262], [Agence France-Presse](#) [286], [Reuters](#) [287], [BBC News](#) [17]
- **June 30, 2017:**Five suicide bombers attack Lebanese forces in Syrian refugee camps in the town of Arsal.
  A sixth attacker throws a grenade at a Lebanese patrol. One of the suicide bombers kills a child after blowing up amidst a refugee family. Seven soldiers are wounded. Source: [Reuters](#) [288]
- **August 31, 2016:**A bomb outside the city of Zahle in the Bekaa Valley kills one and injures several others.
  Security officials believe the bombing targeted Shiite participants traveling to an Ashura celebration event in southern Lebanon. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [19]
- **June 27, 2016:**Eight suicide bombings in the Christian village of Al Qaa in the Bekaa valley kill five and wound at least 28.
  There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Hezbollah blames at least one of the bombings on ISIS. Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [19], [Al Jazeera](#) [161], [BBC News](#) [289], [*New York Times*](#) [290]
- **June 12, 2016:**A bomb explodes outside of a Blom Bank branch in downtown Beirut.
  The bomb damages the office but inflicts no casualties. It is suspected that the bomb was set off by Hezbollah in an attempt to discourage Lebanon's banking industry from abiding by U.S. financial sanctions against the terror group.

Sources: *Independent* [291], U.S. Department of State [19]

- **November 12, 2015:**Twin suicide bombings explode within minutes of each other in Beirut's Bourj al-Barajneh district, a Hezbollah stronghold.
  The blasts kill 44 people and wound 239. One of the suicide bombers whose explosives did not go off tells Lebanese security that he was recruited by ISIS. ISIS later claims responsibility. The bombings are reportedly the worst terror attack in Beirut since the end of Lebanon's civil war. Within 48 hours, Lebanese authorities arrest 11 people, mostly Syrians, in connection to the bombings. Authorities believe the original target was a hospital in Beirut. Sources: CNN [162], *Daily Star* [292], Reuters [293], Australian Broadcasting Corporation [197]
- **January 10, 2015:**Two suicide bombers blow themselves up at Café Omran in Beirut, killing at least nine and wounding 35.
  The Nusra Front claims responsibility. Source: Al Jazeera [294]
- **August 2, 2014 - August 4, 2014:**Lebanese forces arrest an ISIS member, prompting the terror group to launch attacks in Lebanon and seize the Lebanese city of Arsal along the Lebanese-Syrian border.
  The Lebanese army retakes Arsal on August 9. At least 19 Lebanese soldiers are killed and 25 are wounded in the battle. Additionally, at least 42 civilians are killed and 400 are wounded. Sources: *Wall Street Journal* [295], *Daily Star* [296], *Daily Star* [297], Reuters [298]
- **December 27, 2013:**Former Lebanese finance minister and ambassador to the United States Mohamad Chatah dies in a Beirut car bombing.
  Chatah had prominently voiced his support for the United States and his opposition to Hezbollah. Hours before the bombing, Chatah tweeted that Hezbollah had been "pressing hard to be granted similar powers in security & foreign policy matters that Syria exercised in Lebanon for 15 yrs." There are no claims of responsibility, but former Prime Minister Saad Hariri blames Hezbollah for Chatah's murder. Sources: CNN [299], Reuters [300]
- **November 19, 2013:**A double suicide bombing outside of the Iranian embassy in Beirut kills 23, including Iranian cultural attaché Sheikh Ibrahim al-Ansari.
  More than 150 are wounded. The al-Qaeda-linked Abdullah Azzam Brigades claims responsibility and demands that Iranian forces leave Syria. Sources: BBC News [200], *Guardian* [201], Reuters [202]
- **October 19, 2012:**A car bomb kills senior Lebanese intelligence official General Wissam al-Hassan, who had investigated Hezbollah's role in the 2005 Hariri assassination and reportedly supported rebel forces against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Syria's civil war.
  Violent protests erupt during Hassan's funeral. Sources: *Washington Post* [301], *Guardian* [302]
- **September 29, 2008:**A remote-controlled car bomb in Tripoli destroys a nearby bus carrying Lebanese soldiers, killing five and wounding 35 others.
  The bombing is almost identical to one in August that killed 15 people. Source: *Telegraph* [303]
- **August 13, 2008:**A bomb hidden in a suitcase explodes at a bus stop in Tripoli, killing 18 people and wounding at least 45.
  Sources: *Telegraph* [303], Al-Jazeera [304], Reuters [210]
- **May 2008:**Hezbollah launches violent street battles against Lebanese forces after a government decision to dismantle the group's private telephone network.
  Hezbollah fighters capture sections of western Beirut and attack media offices affiliated with the governing Future movement in clashes that leave 65 people dead across the country. The fighting ends with a Qatari-negotiated agreement that brings Hezbollah's political party into a national-unity government and gives it veto power in a new cabinet. Sources: Reuters [266], *New York Times* [269], BBC News [270], *New York Times* [271], Reuters [156], BBC News [154]
- **January 25, 2008:**A car bomb detonates near an overpass in Beirut as Captain Wissam Eid, Lebanon's chief terrorism investigator, drives by.
  The bomb kills Eid and three others. There are no claims of responsibility, but Eid had been investigating Hezbollah's involvement in the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Sources: *New York Times* [305], *Daily Star* [306], Reuters [307], *Guardian* [260]
- **June 13, 2007:**A bomb in the car of anti-Syrian politician Walid Eido kills him and at least nine others in Beirut.
  At least 11 are also wounded. Anti-Syrian parliamentarian Wael Abou-Faour accuses the Syrian government of responsibility. During Eido's funeral, protesters call for revenge against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, whom they believe is allied with Syria. Sources: *Telegraph* [245], *Guardian* [308]
- **May 2007 - September 2007:**On May 20, militants from the al-Qaeda-linked Fatah al-Islam attack Lebanese army positions near the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp.
  The army responds with a three-month siege of Nahr al-Bared. On June 9, five Lebanese soldiers are killed in clashes with the militants. By September 3, the army completes its takeover of the camp, expelling or killing almost 300 Fatah al-Islam fighters from the camp. More than 20 civilians are killed and some 40,000 residents of the camps flee during the three-month-long fight, which is reportedly the worst internal violence Lebanon has experienced since the end of the civil war. Sources: Reuters [235], Brookings Institution [236], *Guardian* [309], BBC News [12]
- **July 2006 - August 2006:**On July 12, Hezbollah launches a cross-border raid into northern Israel, killing eight Israeli soldiers and capturing two others.
  On July 13, Israel and Hezbollah begin a 34-day war. Sources: *New York Times* [149], United Nations [152], *Newsweek*

[275], Times of Israel [276]

- **December 12, 2005:** An explosives-filled car is remotely detonated in the eastern Beirut suburb of Mkalles.
  The explosion kills four people, including anti-Syrian parliamentarian Gebran Tueni, and wounds 32 others. Lebanese anti-Syrian protesters blame Syria for the assassination. A statement faxed to foreign media claims the attack on behalf of the hereto unknown group Strugglers for the Unity and Freedom of al-Sham. The statement also threatens other opponents of "Arabism" in Lebanon. Sources: CNN [310], Financial Times [311], *New York Times* [312], *Washington Post* [313]
- **July 12, 2005:** A bomb explodes in the Beirut suburb of Antelias as the motorcade of the pro-Syrian outgoing Deputy Prime Minister Elias Murr drives by, wounding Murr and killing two others.
  At least a dozen others are also wounded. Sources: *Guardian* [314], *New York Times* [315]
- **June 2005:** On June 2, a bomb planted in the car of anti-Syrian journalist Samir Qasir outside his home in Ashrafiyeh kills Qasir and a passerby.
  On June 21, a bomb planted in the car of former Communist Party leader George Hawi in Beirut kills Hawi, who was known for his anti-Syrian views. The bombing takes place hours after a new pro-Syrian parliament takes office in Lebanon. Druze parliamentarian Ghazi Aridi of the Progressive Socialist Party claims that Hawi's murder is part of a plot to eliminate all Syrian opposition in Lebanon. Sources: BBC News [316], *New York Times* [317], *Washington Post* [318]
- **March 23, 2005:** A bomb explodes in the Alta Vista shopping center in the Christian village of Kaslik, killing three foreign workers and wounding four other people.
  The roof of the mall collapses after the explosion. The anti-Syrian movement blames supporters of the Syrian occupation, alleging that they incited violence in order to demonstrate the need for Syria to maintain order in Lebanon. Sources: *Daily Star* [319], BBC News [320], Associated Press [321], McClatchy [322]
- **March 19, 2005:** A car bomb explodes in New Jdeidah, a predominantly Christian suburb of Beirut, wounding nine people.
  Sources: CNN [323], *Guardian* [324]
- **February 14, 2005:** A bombing in Beirut kills former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others.
  Hezbollah is suspected of carrying out the attack. In June 2011, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) issues arrest warrants for four men, including two Hezbollah members, who are suspected of involvement in the bombing. In August 2020, the STL convicts Hezbollah member Salim Ayyash in absentia but finds three other defendants not guilty. The court does not find direct evidence of the involvement of Hezbollah's leadership in the bombing. Sources: *Guardian* [243], *New York Times* [244], Special Tribunal for Lebanon [3]
- **October 1, 2004:** A car bomb in Beirut wounds former government minister Marwan Hamadeh and kills his driver as they drive by.
  Lebanese analysts believe the bombing is a message against political cooperation between Lebanese Christians and Muslims. Sources: BBC News [325], Fox News [326]
- **March 20, 1996:** A Hezbollah suicide bomber blows himself up near the village of Taibeh, Lebanon, next to an Israeli army convoy, killing one soldier and wounding one civilian.
  Hezbollah says the bombing is in response to the international anti-terrorism conference held in Egypt the week before. Lebanon refused an invitation to the conference. Source: CNN [84]
- **November 22, 1989:** A remote-controlled bomb explodes in a Beirut shop near the passing motorcade of Lebanese President Rene Mouawad, killing the newly elected president and 23 others.
  Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [252], *Time* [327]
- **September 20, 1984:** A suicide car bomb blows up in the annex of the U.S. embassy in Beirut, killing 24 and wounding dozens more.
  The Islamic Jihad Organization, a.k.a. Hezbollah, claims responsibility in a phone call hours after the attack. Sources: *New York Times* [78], U.S. Department of State [79]
- **October 23, 1983:** A Hezbollah suicide truck bombing of U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut kills 241 U.S. service personnel.
  Simultaneously, another suicide bomber drives an explosives-filled pickup truck into a building housing French paratroopers, killing 58 French soldiers. Source: CNN [80]
- **April 18, 1983:** A Hezbollah suicide attack against the U.S. embassy in Beirut kills 63 and wounds 120.
  Sources: START [328], *New York Times* [329], *New York Times* [330]
- **February 5, 1983:** A car bomb explodes outside the PLO headquarters in Beirut, killing 20 and wounding 115.
  The explosion also destroys a building across the street housing Jana, the Libyan press agency, and the temporary Libyan embassy. The Front for the Liberation of Lebanon from Foreigners claims responsibility. Sources: *Christian Science Monitor* [47], *New York Times* [331]
- **September 14, 1982 - September 18, 1982:** On September 14, a bomb outside the Beirut headquarters of the Kataeb Christian political party kills Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel and 32 others.
  In retaliation, Christian Phalangist forces enter the Sabra and Shatilla Palestinian refugee camps on September 15 and kill at least 350 people over the course of three days. The exact fatality figure remains disputed, ranging from 350 to thousands. Sources: Al-Monitor [254], *Daily Star* [255], *New York Times* [332], BBC News [12], Reuters [43]
- **September 1981:** On September 4, four gunmen attack the car of Louis Delamare, the French ambassador to Lebanon,

and kill him.
There are no immediate claims of responsibility. On September 19, a car bomb explodes outside of the PLO headquarters in Sidon, killing 25 and wounding 100. Also that day, a bomb explodes at a cement factory in Chekka, killing 10 and wounding 10. On September 20, a bomb explodes in the Salwa movie theater in west Beirut, killing four and wounding 25. On September 21, a bomb explodes outside of a gas depot in Tripoli, causing damage but no casualties. The Front for the Liberation of Lebanon from Foreigners claims responsibility for the bombings in Sidon, Chekka, and Beirut. Police suspect the Front of the Tripoli bombing as well. Sources: *New York Times* [256], United Press International [333]

- **June 16, 1976:**U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Francis E. Meloy, his economic counselor, Robert O. Waring, and their Lebanese driver, Zoheir Moghrabi, are kidnapped and shot to death.
  Authorities later discover the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is responsible. In 1994, Bassem Farkh and Namek Kamal are sentenced to death for the attack. In 1996, a Lebanese appeals court rules that the attack is covered under a 1990 amnesty agreement for political crimes and frees Farkh and Kamal. Sources: *New York Times* [257], *New York Times* [258], *Daily Star* [259], *Los Angeles Times* [261]

- **April 13, 1975:**Six PLO guerillas fire rifles in the air while driving by the Christian Maronite Church of Notre Dame de la Delivrance.
  In response, Christian Phalangist militants attack a bus carrying mostly Palestinians in Beirut, killing 26. The attack marks the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. Sources: BBC News [75], *Daily Telegraph* [334]

- **May 1974:**On May 15, three members of the DFLP travel from Lebanon and attack a school in Ma'alot, Israel.
  The three take 85 students hostage, demanding the Israeli government release Arab prisoners. The attackers kill 22 children and four adults, and wound more than 70 others before security forces drive them out. The following day, Israeli planes bomb seven Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon in response, killing 27 people. Sources: BBC News [52], BBC News [53], *New York Times* [54], *New York Times* [55], Times of Israel [56]

- **May 8, 1970 - May 12, 1970:**On May 8, members of the PLO faction the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) cross from Lebanon into Israel.
  On May 12, the DFLP members attack an Israeli school bus with RPGs, killing 12 people and wounding more than 20, mostly children. Israel retaliates by shelling four Lebanese villages, killing 13. Later in the month, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan warns the Lebanese government to control its borders. Sources: *New York Times* [49], *New York Times* [50]

- **July 8, 1958:**A bomb explodes at the ABC department store in Beirut, wounding at least 20 people.
  Source: *New York Times* [335]

- **1958:**Lebanese Muslims demand the government join the newly formed United Arab Republic formed by Egypt and Syria.
  Maronite Christians opposed to the move begin violently clashing with Islamic rebels, who launch a wave of attacks to try to force the resignation of Christian President Camille Chamoun. In July, the United States sends a peacekeeping force. The fighting ends July 31 after both sides accept Lebanese army commander General Fuad Chehab as Lebanon's new president. The fighting claims the lives of 2,000 to 4,000 people. Sources: *New York Times* [336], *New York Times* [337], *New York Times* [338], Al Jazeera [339]

- **1951:**Former prime minister Riad Solh, Lebanon's first prime minister, is assassinated while in Amman, Jordan. Members of the Syrian National Socialist party are suspected.
  Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [252], *New York Times* [253], *Daily Star* [340]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

According to the U.S. Department of State, because Lebanon lacks a comprehensive counterterrorism law, the government relies on sections of its criminal code to prosecute terrorism. However, the State Department also notes that Lebanon's confessional system of government can make the implementation of the criminal code difficult. The State Department acknowledges that the Lebanese security services have disrupted multiple terror networks in Lebanon, including ISIS networks, but notes that Hezbollah's involvement in Lebanese politics prevents the Lebanese government from fully exercising its authority within the country. (Source: U.S. Department of State [19])

The Lebanese criminal code punishes terrorist financing with sentences of hard labor and fines. According to the U.S. State Department, Lebanon improved its Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) strategies in 2016. In October 2016, the Lebanese parliament passed a new tax law strengthening Lebanon's AML/CFT. Additionally, Lebanon has participated in the U.S. State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance program since 2006. The program provides aid for border security enhancements and law enforcement. (Source: U.S. Department of State [19], MENAFATF [341])

International Counter-Extremism

International Bodies

Lebanon is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. MENAFATF evaluated Lebanon's AML/CFT processes in 2009 and is due to undertake a second evaluation in the future. Lebanon's financial intelligence unit, the Special Investigation Commission (SIC), is a member of the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units, and Lebanon participates in the international Counter-ISIS Finance Group. The Lebanese government also makes an annual payment to support the U.N. Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which is investigating the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. In 2016, Lebanon contributed approximately $32.5 million to the U.N. Special Tribunal. (Source: MENAFATF [342], MENAFATF [341], U.S. Department of State [19])

Lebanon held the presidency of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) in 2018. The Financial Intelligence Unit of Lebanon's Central Bank—the Special Investigation Commission (SIC)— is a member of the Egmont Group, an informal network of 164 financial intelligence units. Lebanon is also a member of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition's Counter-ISIS Finance Group. (Source: U.S. Department of State [343])

Financial Sanctions and Hezbollah

Lebanon has been the subject of international sanctions aimed at disrupting Hezbollah's financial networks. The U.S. government alone has designated more than 100 Lebanese financial institutions, commercial entities, and individuals linked to Hezbollah since 2001. In 2015, the U.S. government passed the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA), which targeted Lebanese banks. The Lebanese Central Bank directed the country's financial institutions to comply with HIFPA. In early 2016, Lebanese media reported that some banks were refusing to open new accounts for suspected Hezbollah supporters, and that June, the Central Bank announced the pending closure of 3,000 Hezbollah-linked accounts. (Sources: Reuters [344], U.S. Department of the Treasury [20], Times of Israel [345], Reuters [21], U.S. Department of State [19], Al Jazeera [346], Al-Monitor [347], *Asharq Al-Awsat* [348])

After HIFPA's passage, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah defiantly responded that Hezbollah's members were not invested in Lebanese financial systems. But Hezbollah parliamentary leaders simultaneously warned that sanctions could push Lebanon toward bankruptcy and cause a "wide rift" in the country if Lebanese citizens stopped patronizing Lebanese banks out of fear of sanctions. One member of a Lebanese parliamentary delegation that met with U.S. officials after HIFPA's passage warned that sanctions on Lebanon's banking sector could cause "a total collapse of the Lebanese state." (Sources: Middle East Eye [349], Al-Monitor [347], Reuters [350], Al-Monitor [351])

Public Opinion

Religious and Political Divisions

Lebanese politics are largely divided along sectarian lines. In the 2009 parliamentary election, 76 percent of Lebanese Sunnis voted for the anti-Syria Future movement and its March 14 coalition. The Christian community split its vote with 49.4 percent voting for parties affiliated with the Hezbollah-led March 8 coalition and 46.1 percent voting for the March 14 coalition. Though the Future movement won the largest share of seats in the election, Hezbollah and its allies combined to win second place, forcing the creation of a coalition government. (Sources: Al-Monitor [352], Associated Press [353])

Ahead of the 2009 election, pundits believed that Hezbollah could win a majority in the Lebanese parliament with the help of Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, the only Christian party aligned with Hezbollah. Christian voters were reportedly divided on Hezbollah, particularly regarding the issue of disarming the group. Aoun argued that "Hezbollah's weapons will no longer be a problem when the causes behind its existence disappear, including the borders' issues." A statement by the Maronite Christian Church ahead of the election alluded to the threat of Iranian influence over Lebanon if Hezbollah won. (Sources: CNN [354], Associated Press [353])

Between 2006 and 2016, Lebanese belief that the government is corrupt held steady above 80 percent. According to a September 2016 Gallup poll, only 25 percent of Lebanese citizens approved of the country's elected leadership. (Sources: Gallup [355])

ISIS

According to an August 2017 Pew Research Center poll, 97 percent of Lebanese citizens believe that ISIS poses the major threat to their country. (Source: Pew Research Center [356])

Hezbollah

According to a 2014 Pew Research Center poll, 86 percent of Lebanese Shiites held favorable views of Hezbollah, compared with 31 percent of Lebanese Christians and only 9 percent of Lebanese Sunnis. Nonetheless, a 2014 Beirut Center for Research and Information survey found that approximately two-thirds of Lebanon's Christians believe Hezbollah is protecting the country from ISIS. The survey also found that 66 percent of Christians supported Hezbollah's intervention in Syria, compared with only 39 percent in June 2013. In January 2015, Hezbollah Executive Council chief Sheikh Nabil Qaouk stated his belief that many Lebanese Sunnis will willingly join Hezbollah in its next conflict with Israel. (Sources: Pew Research Center [22], Al-Akhbar English [23], *Jerusalem Post* [357])