

Lebanon: a fragile country becomes a new war front

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The current Israeli military escalation against Lebanon is part of an Israeli war machine that continues to commit genocide in Gaza, and to bomb Syria, Yemen and Iran, threatening a wider regional war. This is not the first war waged by the state of Israel against Lebanon, always justified as being 'targeted' against organisations that Tel Aviv considers terrorist. In the past, it was the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the left-wing Lebanese National Movement. Today, it is Hezbollah. For Lebanon, the current Israeli war is also part of a sequence of crises that began with the popular uprising of 2019 and its subsequent repression, and continued with the Covid pandemic, the port explosion, a power vacuum and an economic collapse from which Lebanon was just beginning to recover.

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Lebanon: a country at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict

Lebanon gained its independence in 1943 following the French Mandate which had been imposed on the country in 1920. Political representation in Lebanon is organised along confessional lines. The Lebanese confessional system (like confessionalism in general) is one of the main instruments used by the ruling classes to reinforce their control over the popular classes, by keeping them subordinate to their confessional leaders.

A confessional political system

At the same time, the Lebanese confessional system was born in parallel with the development of Lebanese capitalism and in interaction with French colonial rule. Since Lebanon's independence in 1943, the confessional nature of the Lebanese state has served the political and economic elites of the ruling confessional groups, who have relied on the country's free market economic orientation to consolidate their power. After the end of the civil war in 1989, this power only increased.



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Successive Lebanese governments have adopted neo-liberal policies that have led to the deepening of the historically constituted characteristics of the Lebanese economy: a development model centred on finance and services in which social inequalities and regional disparities are very pronounced.

The consequences of the Nakba in Lebanon

Lebanon was affected from the outset by the birth of the state of Israel or Nakba ('catastrophe' in Arabic) in 1948. In addition to its crimes against the Palestinians, the newly created Israeli army of occupation also committed crimes in Lebanon during this period, notably in the village of Houla at the end of October 1948, massacring all the civilians who had remained there in two days. Lebanon also took in more than 100,000 Palestinian refugees. The United Nations established 16 official Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. At its peak, the number of Palestinian refugees probably exceeded half a million, or more than 10% of Lebanon's total population, although UNRWA now estimates the number at around 250,000.

The origins of the civil war from 1982 to 2000

Subsequently, Lebanon suffered numerous attacks by the Israeli army of occupation and several invasions and wars. In 1978, the Israeli army of occupation invaded part of southern Lebanon to combat the Palestinian resistance. Four years after this invasion, the Israeli state began a new invasion, this time extending as far as the capital Beirut.

The aim of the invasion, dubbed 'Peace for Galilee' in 1982, was to eliminate the Palestinian resistance, the political presence of the PLO and the progressive Lebanese forces, and to install a friendly regime in Beirut. In this context, the capital underwent a deadly siege and was bombed on a massive scale, finally leading to the expulsion of the PLO forces from Beirut to Tunis in 1982. Following this forced departure of the PLO, the terrible massacres of Sabra and Shatila were committed in September 1982, under the responsibility of the Israeli occupation.

The role of Hezbollah after 2000

The creation and development of Hezbollah was historically linked to various elements of the invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli occupation army in 1982 and the occupation of the country until 2000, as well as to the political dynamics and regional projects of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). The occupation of southern Lebanon ended in 2000 with the withdrawal of Israeli troops, with the exception of the Shebaa farms, a disputed area straddling Lebanon and Syria.

The Israeli army of occupation launched a new war against Lebanon in 2006, with the support of the United States, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,200 people, including 270 Hezbollah fighters. Israel lost more than 150 people, mainly soldiers. Despite the asymmetry of losses and military strength - both largely in Israel's favour - Israel failed to achieve its objectives by significantly weakening Hezbollah, both politically and militarily, which Hezbollah considered a political success.

At the same time, and this is a major difference with the current Israeli war on Lebanon, not a single senior Hezbollah leader was killed during the 33 days of war, despite numerous attempts by the Israeli occupation army, including the dropping of 22 tonnes of bombs on a bunker in Beirut supposedly occupied by senior Hezbollah members, or the failure to kidnap key leaders.

After the 2006 war, the Israeli-Lebanese border saw only a few security incidents, most of which

occurred between 2013 and 2014, after the outbreak of the Syrian uprising. Hezbollah retaliated militarily against multiple Israeli incursions.

Lebanon: after 7 October 2023

Following the outbreak of Israel's genocidal war against the Gaza Strip after 7 October 2023, Hezbollah announced its 'unity of fronts' strategy, the aim of which was to link the Lebanese front with that of Gaza. The party's initial aim was to show solidarity with its Palestinian political allies, and to be credible when mobilising the rhetoric of resistance, while seeking to protect its interests and alliances linked to Iran in the region.

Hezbollah's calculated military operations

The Lebanese movement's first targets were the Shebaa Farms in occupied Lebanese territory, not Israeli territory directly. Subsequently, they carried out attacks on Israeli military sites. Nevertheless, Hezbollah's military operations remained calculated and relatively moderate compared with the violence of the Israeli attacks, with the aim of avoiding an all-out war with Israel.

However, the party certainly had no idea that the genocidal war against Gaza would last so long and that Israel would escalate its attacks against Lebanon to such an intense level, with the full support of the United States and major European powers such as France.

Policy of unity of fronts rejected by the Lebanese people

In mid-September 2024, the deadly violence of the Israeli army's occupation accelerated with military escalation and terrorist operations leading to the murder of around 570 people, the vast majority of them civilians, including 50 children, and thousands of wounded. This was followed by massive bombing campaigns aimed at assassinating Hezbollah's senior military and political figures, but also killing around two thousand civilians and forcing the displacement of over a million people.

The unity of the fronts is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to defend politically among the Lebanese population. The cost for Lebanon is increasingly heavy, and Hezbollah does not want this conflict to be exploited by its domestic political enemies who would make it the main culprit for all the country's misfortunes.

Hezbollah finds itself in the most dangerous situation since its creation, and there is no end in sight, as Israel continues its war against Lebanon, which also includes targeting the party's infrastructure and capabilities. On the national scene, its political and social isolation among the Lebanese population is very likely to increase.

Building an alternative vision of society

Despite the Israeli war and the country's socio-economic crisis, forms of solidarity with the displaced are being put in place across the country, even if political tensions continue to exist. There is currently no organised progressive political alternative in the country with significant capacity for action, despite unsuccessful attempts in recent years to build such a project, particularly following the popular uprising in 2019. The need to build a genuine counter-hegemonic project, rooted in the

country's popular classes and in coalition with independent social forces such as the trade unions, feminist and anti-racist organisations, remains a necessity for the future of the popular classes in the country, but first the Israeli war machine must be stopped.

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P.S.

• IVP. Sunday 27 October 2024:
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8722>

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