

**Present Israeli War Against
Lebanon and Hizbullah
Background and Immediate Consequences**

**Boutros Labaki
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Basic facts about Lebanon

Lebanon has an area of: 10500 Km². It is a very small country having: 4,000,000 inhabitants (including 400 000 Palestinians, 200,000 Syrians and 3,400,000 Lebanese)

Around 50% of Lebanese residents pertain to Christian churches and around 50% pertain to muslim communities. Lebanese belong to eighteen communities, living in a mountainous country composed of two ranges of mountain parallel to the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Mountains and hills count for 80% of Lebanese territory. The density of Lebanon is 400 inhabitants per square kilometer. It has been historically a mountainous safe shelter for religious, ethnic and political minorities persecuted in other parts of the Middle East

The political regime is a consociational democracy, with proportional representation of religious communities and regions, in the Parliament, the executive, the administration, the army and security forces.

The economy is based on services, banking, tourism, transport, transit, insurance, etc..., and on export oriented manufacturing industry and agriculture.

4 to 5 million Lebanese live and work outside Lebanon in Australia, the Arab Gulf, Africa, EU, USA, Canada and Latin American countries.

Political developments in Lebanon

Lebanon has been infiltrated since 1965 by Palestinian fighters, supported, armed, trained and pushed by the Syrian Baathist regime in the framework of its competition with Nasser for the Arab leadership. After the 1967 Arab defeat, Palestinians started their guerrilla war against Israel from Lebanon, especially after they failed to take control of Jordan in 1970. They tried to take control of Lebanon in 1969 and 1976 with local forces (a coalition of Muslim, Druze and leftist political groups). At this period, Syria, after supporting Palestinians in Lebanon to weaken the Lebanese government under Christian hegemony, made an alliance with this government and introduced her forces in Lebanon, in order to control the Palestinians and to gradually control Lebanon between 1975 and 2005. This was done in spite of Israeli invasions in 1978 and 1982 and an Israeli occupation of South Lebanon until May 2000.

With the end of the cold war in 1989, the US moved to stop the wars in Lebanon.

In 1990, with the agreement of Israel and the support of the US, (mainly against Syria's support to pull out Saddam from Kuwait), Syrian troops entered in the only unoccupied zone of Lebanon, crushed down the legal government, and installed a pro-Syrian government.

During the wars on Lebanese territory between 1975 and 1990: 25% of Lebanese population was displaced, 30% emigrated, per capita GDP fell to 50% of its 1974 level, 3% of Lebanese were killed, the infrastructure, the educational system and the economy were partly destroyed.

The Syrians tried to legitimize their occupation by anti constitutional and unfair legislative elections, widely boycotted by the population (85%) in 1992. The same illegality and unfairness applied to the 1996, 2000 and 2005 legislative elections.

In 2000, with the withdrawal of Israel from South Lebanon, popular moves for the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty, who, since 1990, were mainly Christian movements, extended to other communities: Druzes and Sunni Muslim. This happened after the extension of the presidential mandate, under Syrian pressure in 2004, and the assassination of ex Prime Minister Hariri, (a rich prominent muslim sunni leader) in February 2005. After all that, the Sunni community joined massively the opposition to Syrian occupation. Syrians were forced to withdraw militarily from Lebanon. They were forced also by France and the US who passed the 1559 Security Council resolution in September 2004, calling for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, for the respect by foreign forces of the sovereignty and the constitution of Lebanon and for the disarmament of the Lebanese and non Lebanese militias.

Elections were held, in May and June 2005, after the return from exile of ex Prime Minister General Michel Aoun. These elections even organized under the "year 2000" anti-constitutional electoral law, produced a parliament where pro Syrians became a minority.

Lebanon and Shia'a Muslim fundamentalism

The main Shia'a Muslim fundamentalist group in Lebanon is the Hizbullah. Other groups like the Al-Daawa Party, Amal Islamiya and Tufaily group are less important. Hizbullah is a Lebanese extension of Iranian Hizbullah, and the Iranian "Guardians of the Revolution" (Pasdarans). They developed in Lebanon especially after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, and gained ground in the muslim shia'a community. They are mainly supported by the Iranian regime, and its ally the Syrian regime, as a tool for their "war by proxy" against Israel. Hizbullah was effective in driving out Israeli occupation from South Lebanon in 2000, with the support of the Iranian and Syrian regime, and the Lebanese regime under Syrian control (until 2005). Hizbullah suppressed the secular resistance movements to Israel, mainly driven by the Lebanese Communist Party and the Syrian National Social Party.

Hizbullah has a security branch and an armed branch, the "Islamic Resistance" (Al Mukawama Al Islamia), in spite of the end of Israeli occupation of Lebanon. It has also a political branch: the "Party of God" (Hizbullah) which have deputies in the Parliament, and two Ministers in the Cabinet. They control a number of municipalities in South Lebanon, the Bekaa, Beirut southern suburb and some other areas. Hizbullah is also very active in the lebanese civil society: in trade unions, student unions, and through a varied network of religious, charity and social organizations. He owns a TV, a radio, publications, and a research center. Hizbullah is also active in the Lebanese economy through a number of companies and other institutions in several sectors (construction, public works, agriculture, services, manufacturing activities, trade activities, telecommunications, financing and others type of trades...). They have a number of social institutions (health-institutions, safety networks, regular schools, and religious schools). Some tendencies of Hizbullah are trying to establish in areas they control, Islamic courts, to implement

"sharia", through an association called "Al amr bil maaruf wal nahi bil munkar". They have also housing and marriage schemes, an organization called "Jihad – Al – Bina'a" for building infrastructure and development activities, youth, boy scout and girl scout movements. They have representatives in foreign countries. They have also organizations in the Shia Lebanese communities abroad (in Arab countries, Africa, Europe, the Americas and Australia).

So the Hizbullah shia'a fundamentalist movement is a strong multi faced movement, very active in the Lebanese society, economy, culture and politics. Some analysts say Hizbullah is a "State within the State". Dominant force in the Shia'a Lebanese community, Hizbullah is also a strong instrument in the hands of the Islamic conservative forces ruling Iran, for their policies in Lebanon, in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and for their international influence.

Other Shia'a fundamentalist movements (like the "Hizbul da'awa" of Iraki origin) are also active in Lebanon through a network of clergy persons, of schools, charity organizations and other social, religious and financial organizations. But they have no armed branch, and no public political organization comparable to Hizbullah.

In the Arab World and the Middle East as in other parts of the world, globalization and religious fundamentalism are interrelated. Globalization is accelerating as a consequence of the crack down of the Soviet bloc. The present liberal, but not democratically controlled, globalization is a new brand of colonization, domination and exploitation of poor and weak communities and populations by rich and strong ones.

The religious fundamentalism of the religions of the "South" mainly Islam, is a reaction against these forms of oppression, taking sometimes violent forms: terrorism. (I am not here trying at all to justify this type of violence but to explain its roots).

Lebanon is in the heart of the Arab World and has been a safe heaven for several christian and muslim religious and political minorities, persecuted elsewhere in the Middle East. It has developed a form of consociational democracy where all religious groups can share in the state power and live their own cultural and religious specificities.

But the expansion of Israel especially after the 1967 war, as a part of the Western domination of the Arab East, has destabilized the Lebanese state and society. And the consequence of the Arab defeat in 1967, transformed Lebanon in a battle ground for the wars by proxy between Arab states and organizations (Syria, PLO, Irak, Lybia...) and Israel on the Lebanese territory, without important losses for the non Lebanese Arab sponsors... The 1967 Arab defeat exacerbated muslim sunni fundamentalism in the Arab East on the one hand. On the other hand the failure of the "dependant modernization" the Shah was trying to impose on Iran, exacerbated shia fundamentalism and lead to the "Islamic Revolution" of 1979 in Iran, and the development of Shia'a fundamentalist movements elsewhere especially in Lebanon.

After the withdrawal of Israel from South Lebanon, in 1990 and 2000, Hizbullah developed a military infrastructure in South Lebanon with the support of the Syrian and Iranian regimes. The Lebanese army and security forces could not deploy in the area in implementation of UN Security Council resolution 425. Hizbullah controlled the area pretexting that Shebaa farms were not liberated and started limited and selective attacks against Israelis forces in this sector. The part of UN Security Council resolution 1559 covering the disarmament of militias in Lebanon could not be implemented by external dialogue during the two last years.

Present destruction Israeli war on Lebanon and Hizbullah

The kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hizbullah, south of the Lebanese – Israeli armistice line has occurred Wednesday 12th of July, just after the transmittal to the UN Security Council of the Iranian nuclear file from Vienna. This chronological conjunction is probably not a coincidence. Israel is responding in a completely demesurate but very well organized form with the following preliminary results:

- Killing of more than 300 Lebanese civilians
- Wounding of the several thousands Lebanese civilians
- Wide destruction of the transportation infrastructure (bridges, highways, roads, airports, ports, trucks,...)
- Wide destruction of buildings especially in the south Lebanon and the south – western suburbs of Beirut.
- Destruction of fuel and gasoline stations
- Destruction of oil tanks in several points of the Lebanese coast: Zahrani Power Plant, Beirut Airport, Dora Oil tanks, Amshit Oil tanks, ...
- Hitting several power plants: Jiyveh, Baalbeck...
- Hitting construction and industrial plants in several sectors and areas
- Destroying portable telephone relay stations, and fix telephone exchanges.
- Destroying systematically all the infrastructure necessary for life in southern Lebanese villages (water tanks, public electrical transformers, gasoline stations, houses) in order to force people to leave their villages, and create a “buffer zone”...
- Hitting health and emergency infrastructure (Civilian Defense health center in Tyre,...)
- One of the results is the displacement of around half a million of Lebanese refugees and the emigration of more than one hundred thousand persons.
- The complete collapse of the summer touristic season (which attract normally 1 to 1,5 millions tourists mainly from the Arab Gulf).
- Quasi complete paralysis of exports and imports
- Fall of the Beirut Stock Exchange Market
- Pressure on the exchange rate of the lebanese currency.
- Paralyzing the summer artistic festivals: Baalbeck, Byblos, Beiteddine, Tyre, Tripoli,...
- Paralyzing partly several services activities: banking, insurance, technical and legal services, public administration...

It is finally a complete blocus on Lebanon, and a destruction of its infrastructure.

Iran and Syria have their agenda in pushing Hizbullah in order to defuse international pressure on the Iranian nuclear file, and the International Court to be established for dealing with the assassination of late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and other Lebanese personalities.

Israel has also its agenda in trying to crack down Hizbullah as a permanent danger on its Northern border, and a support to the resistance of Palestinians in the occupied territories of Ghaza and the West bank.

Another point of the Israeli agenda is to try to defeat the expansion of Iranian influence west words.

It is difficult to predict now the duration of this war and its consequences in terms of human lifes, human suffering, physical destructions, and economic losses. More difficult is probably to predict the political consequences of this war in Lebanon, the Middle and the international scene.

Boutros Labaki