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The Lebanese Crisis

By

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The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization.

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Lebanon stands at a critical juncture as it has been facing a multi-dimensional crisis since the onset of the Iran-Israel war. The initial crisis began akin to simple border spillover from the intense conflict and has rapidly evolved into one of Lebanon's most severe crises since its Civil War. The conflict is complicated by severe humanitarian issues, political fragmentation, and insecurity in maintaining state sovereignty and territory. The history of Israel's involvement in Lebanon dates to 1978, and 1982, stemming from the push to remove the Palestine Liberation Organisation, culminating in a bitter 20-year occupation that also prompted the rise of Hezbollah.²

Trigger: Hezbollah-Israel Escalation

The trigger that involved Lebanon in the current crisis was Hezbollah's retaliatory drone and missile attacks after the killing of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.³ By doing so, Hezbollah plunged the country into a full-scale escalation in the form of widespread retaliatory strikes by the Israeli government.⁴ Bombardment was conducted across Lebanon, including strikes on Beirut and the southern regions.⁵ What was initially a mere response to Iranian support is now feared to potentially be the next 'main arena'⁶ after the Tehran campaign, as Tel Aviv plans on extending its involvement in southern Lebanon.

Since early March, the Israeli offensive has grown significantly and moved past specialised aerial operations to ground offensives and indiscriminate airstrikes. The operations are meant to target Hezbollah infrastructure, which they claim is entrenched within civilian areas. As a result, the conflict has resultantly intensified into full-scale cross-border warfare as Hezbollah continues to operate against Israel. Hezbollah's involvement in the Iranian counterattack came as the perfect opportunity for Tel Aviv, as it observed that the ceasefire in November 2024 did not lead to disarming the terrorist group as promised by the Lebanese government.

Israeli Strategy

Israel voiced its intention to establish a 'security zone' in southern Lebanon, potentially extending to the Litani River, which covers about 8-10% of Lebanon's territory. Prior to the escalation, Israeli strikes on southern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley were a daily occurrence despite the 2024 ceasefire, leading to the deaths of 127 civilians⁷ and the destruction of 10,000 buildings, according to Amnesty International⁸. This raises the question of whether new territorial

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/19/opinion/israel-lebanon-iran-hezbollah.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

³ <https://timep.org/2026/03/02/how-did-lebanon-get-pulled-into-the-war-and-whats-happened-since/>

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-strike-hits-beirut-apartment-block-lebanese-media-reports-2026-03-11/>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/16/podcasts/the-daily/israel-lebanon-airstrikes.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/19/opinion/israel-lebanon-iran-hezbollah.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

⁷ https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israels-military-occupy-swathe-southern-lebanon-defence-chief-says-2026-03-24/?utm_source

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/14/world/middleeast/lebanon-beirut-israel-displaced.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

aims in these areas have been longstanding objectives. Their current strategy includes the destruction of infrastructure, including bridges and transport networks, clearing the border to stop Hezbollah movement, and a potential long-term military presence signalling a shift from deterrence to territorial control. Israel's unprecedented onslaught has given Washington an opportunity to create the much-needed distinction between Lebanese sovereignty and counterterrorism.⁹ However, considering the Trump administration's general war direction in the past few weeks there may not be much room for such movement.

Humanitarian Crisis

The humanitarian crisis has been severe as Israeli operations have included issuing evacuation orders for all residents located south of the Litani River, in the southern suburbs of Beirut known as Dahiya, and in parts of Bekaa Valley. The resulting mass exodus involves 830,000 people, approximately 14% of the total population, according to Lebanon's Ministry of Social Affairs, which Human Rights Watch feels may be a potential violation of the laws of war considering the lack of protection provided to the displaced population.¹⁰ Furthermore, continued military operations, the destruction of crucial infrastructure, and consistent Israeli presence in southern Lebanon is likely to undermine already shaky institutions and potentially further entrench Hezbollah's resistance¹¹. The death toll has also climbed significantly with over 1,000 fatalities reported in just weeks after the escalation.¹²

Internal Political Crisis

In an unprecedented act, the state has officially condemned Hezbollah and declared its military activities illegal in an effort to redefine the blurred lines of its state sovereignty.¹³ The act has created a novel political fragmentation internal to the nation creating a dichotomy between the government and the powerful non-state actor. Expulsion of the Iranian envoy from Lebanon further heightened this fragmentation.¹⁴ While the move aimed to create distance from Tehran and potentially ease the onslaught by Israel it may also have further complicated the domestic situation as Hezbollah remains influential militarily, politically, and socially. There has, however, been a significant shift as Hezbollah is receiving criticism from its traditional support base including the Shiite community.¹⁵ This shift may signal a better-supported Lebanese government however the continued onslaught indicates that Israel and the U.S has not taken note of the government's efforts to remove themselves from Iran and Hezbollah. Israeli territorial aims may have become the main aim of the current conflict, which means dealing with them in the south may be yet another long-term struggle for which a precedent has historically already been set.

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/19/opinion/israel-lebanon-iran-hezbollah.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/14/world/middleeast/lebanon-beirut-israel-displaced.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/16/podcasts/the-daily/israel-lebanon-airstrikes.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

¹² <https://www.reuters.com/world/lebanons-mounting-death-toll-2026-03-20/>

¹³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-military-says-projectiles-were-fired-lebanon-2026-03-01/>

¹⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-war-us-israel-news-updates-2026/card/lebanon-orders-iranian-ambassador-to-leave-pgK3pV5Zx3N3OsiQaeyl?>

¹⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/03/18/iran-war-hezbollah-israel-lebanon/>



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