

Profiles

Wartime militias

The early phase of the civil war (1975–77) saw two major groupings emerge: the Arab nationalist, leftist and pro-Palestinian **National Movement** (LNM), led by Druze chief Kamal Jumblatt, and the more conservative, Christian-led **Lebanese Front**, who wanted to disarm the Palestinians in Lebanon and on whose side Syria intervened.

Progressive Socialist Party

The Druze-supported PSP was a major part of the LNM, with the Druze community fighting behind their chief Kamal Jumblatt. Walid Jumblatt assumed leadership in 1977 after his father was assassinated. The PSP's main adversaries were the Christian Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces. It controlled much of the Chouf region and played a central role in the War of the Mountain in 1983 when it defeated the Lebanese Forces.

Palestinian militias

The presence and agenda of Palestinian militias was a major factor in the first phase of the civil war. The **Palestinian Liberation Organisation** (PLO) based itself in Lebanon after its expulsion from Jordan in 1970. It challenged the weak Lebanese state by launching guerrilla attacks against Israel and gained control over the southern regions. Israel invaded Lebanese territory in 1978 and 1982 and eventually ousted the PLO leadership from Lebanon.

The main factions in the PLO were PLO leader Yasser Arafat's **Fatah**, the **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine** (PFLP) and the **Palestine Liberation Front** (PLF). The **Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine** (DFLP) was positioned somewhere between pro-Arafat factions and Anti-Arafat 'rejectionists'.

A number of Palestinian factions were co-opted by Syria and at times fought groups aligned with Arafat. The **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command** (PFLP-GC) and **Sa'iqa** (or the Vanguard for the Popular Liberation War), a Palestinian Baathist group controlled by Syria, fought PLO forces in Tripoli in 1983 and inside the refugee camps during the 1980s. The **Fatah Revolutionary Council**, formed by Abu Nidal after a split with the PLO, was held responsible for multiple political assassinations including some in the West.

Lebanese Forces

Formed in 1976 by Bachir Gemayel, the son of the Kataeb leader, as a coalition of right-wing militias and the main militia for the Lebanese Front. In 1980 it forcefully unified other Christian militias such as the National Liberal Party's **Nummur** and developed into a powerful armed force and autonomous administration in the central Christian regions of Lebanon under Samir Geagea. At different times it fought the LNM, PLO, the Syrian Army, the PSP, and the armed forces led by General Michel Aoun. At the end of the war it became a political party led by Geagea.

Marada

A conservative Christian militia group based in the north around the city of Zghorta and allied to Syria. It was controlled by Tony Frangieh, son of President Suleiman Frangieh, until his assassination in 1978 by Phalangists.

Amal

A Shia group that grew in response to the marginalisation of Shiites and their frustration at the domination of Palestinian groups and Israeli attacks. Founded by Musa Sadr in the 1970s as the militia wing of his **Harakat al-Mahrumin** (Movement of the Deprived), Amal became one of the most important militias in the civil war and an ally of Syria. Under the leadership of Nabih Berri, it had notable conflicts with Palestinian groups during the 'Camp War' in 1986–87, and the PSP in Beirut. After the Israeli invasion of 1982, Amal was challenged within the Shia community by Hezbollah and lost control of Beirut's Shia southern suburbs in 1988–90.

Hezbollah

A Shia religious group that emerged between 1982 and 1985 to fight Israeli troops' occupation of half of Lebanon, Hezbollah was more closely associated with the 1979 Iranian revolution than Amal, and enjoyed greater support from the more devout elements of Shiite society. Hezbollah organised a powerful and disciplined militia which received training from Iran's Revolutionary Guards and led the anti-Israeli national resistance. After the war's end, this status meant that it was the only militia to legally retain its arms. It changed its name from 'Islamic resistance' to 'National resistance' to stress its primacy on the Lebanese scene.

South Lebanon Army

Formed in 1979, the SLA was a breakaway group from the **Free Lebanon Army**, which had splintered from the Lebanese Army in the southern region bordering the area occupied by Israel in 1978. The SLA was essentially an Israeli proxy that fought against the PLO, Amal, and Hezbollah. It collapsed in 2000 as Israel withdrew, with some 3,000 SLA members fleeing with them.

Current political parties

Since 2005 many of Lebanon's political parties have aligned with one of two alliances, the **8 March Alliance** and the **14 March Alliance**. The 14 March Alliance was named for the date of the anti-Syrian street protest in 2005 that prompted Syria's military withdrawal. The 8 March grouping was similarly named after the date of a pro-Syrian demonstration the same month.

14 March groups

Future Movement (Mustaqbal)

The party of Saad al-Hariri, son of assassinated former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Its outlook is liberal and secular but much of its support comes from the Sunni Muslim community, many elements of which closed ranks behind the movement after Rafiq al-Hariri's death. Originally an urban party based in Beirut and Sidon,

the Future Movement has been reaching out to poor rural Sunni communities in Akkar, Dinniyeh and West Beqaa, attracting religious militant groups whose agenda it has unwillingly boosted. It is the largest member of the March 14 Alliance and has a number of media outlets including Future Television, Radio Orient and *Al-Mustaqbal* daily newspaper.

Lebanese Forces

Founded as a political party in 1991 by ex-militia leader Samir Geagea, the LF is a right wing, mainly Maronite party, advocating extensive decentralisation and even federalism. An opponent of Syria, Geagea was convicted of murder and imprisoned between 1994 and 2005, but freed after parliament passed an amnesty bill following Syria's withdrawal.

Lebanese Social Democratic Party

Commonly known as Kataeb or the Phalanges, this is a conservative party formed in 1936 and supported by Maronites and other Christian voters. Its founder, Pierre Gemayel was prominent in the civil war, as was his son Bachir, who founded the Lebanese Forces. Kataeb is currently led by former President Amine Gemayel, who returned from exile in 2000 and won back control of the party after 2005.

Other parties

The 14 March Alliance include: the **National Liberal Party**, a centre-right, mainly Christian party formed in 1958 by President Camille Chamoun; the **Democratic Left Movement**, a leftist, secular party founded in 2004 by ex-Communist militants who criticised the domination of Hezbollah over the Left; the **Murr Bloc**; the **Social Democrat Hunchakian Party**, the **Armenian Democratic Liberal Party** and a number of independents in the Christian communities. Branches of the Sunni militant group **Jamaa Islamiyya** support the 14 March.

8 March groups

Free Patriotic Movement

A political party officially formed in 2005 and led by General Michel Aoun. Aoun was a former army commander (1983–88) and prime minister (1988–90) who declared a 'war of liberation' against Syria in 1989 and was exiled to France between 1991 and 2005. Aounist support is mainly Christian, with a small Shia following. It has maintained an alliance with Hezbollah since 2006, on the basis of a 'memorandum of understanding' about confessional peace, disarming Hezbollah and normalising relations with Syria.

Amal

Since the end of the war, Amal has been continuously represented in government. Its leader Nabih Berri has been elected Speaker of Parliament on five occasions, most recently in 2009 and enjoys extended patronage powers. Amal has remained close to Syria. In recent years it has cooperated with Hezbollah to enhance the Shia position within state institutions and counter what they consider the Sunni domination of Hariri and Mustaqbal.

Hezbollah

Led by the charismatic cleric Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah since 1992, Hezbollah is the main Shia party. It enjoys large popular support rooted in religious conviction and its participation in the national power-sharing system since 1992. Hezbollah became part of the 8 March government for the first time in June 2011. Its political power stems primarily from its role as the champion of national resistance against Israel, which allows it to maintain militia forces superior to the national army. It has strong links to both Iran and Syria and has been labelled a terrorist group in some Western countries. Its success in withstanding the Israeli onslaught during the 2006 war led to admiration from the Arab world but reinforced critics and hostility from the 14 March parties who see it as the main obstacle to domestic peace and state sovereignty.

In 2011 four senior Hezbollah members were indicted by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) for involvement in the Hariri assassination, an accusation and judicial process vehemently opposed by the group.

Other parties in the 8 March Alliance include: the **Syrian Social Nationalist Party**, a party acting as a proxy for Damascus; the **Baath Party**, the Lebanese branch of the Damascus-based Arab Socialist Baath party; the **Independent Nasserite Movement**, an ex-Sunni militia reformed in 2006; the **Lebanese Democratic Party**, a Druze faction led by Talal al-Arslan; the **Marada Movement**, a right wing Maronite party led by Suleiman Frangieh Jr; the Armenian **Tashnaq Party**; the **Arab Democratic Party**, a pro-Syrian Alawite party based in Tripoli; the **Communist Party**; and two Sunni Islamist Parties: Hizb al-Tahrir (Liberation Party), Tawhid (Islamic Unification Movement in Tripoli).

Progressive Socialist Party

The predominantly Druze-supported PSP has been led by Walid Jumblatt since 1977, and is akin to a communal organisation under his hereditary chieftaincy. Although not as powerful a party as a militia group, it still plays something of a 'king-making' role on the national scene. A member of the original 14 March Alliance, Jumblatt changed course several times and built bridges with Hezbollah and Syria before returning to his liberal allies. Although a progressive party and a member of the Socialist International, the PSP is opposed to the introduction of proportionality in the electoral system in order to maintain a role greater than its demographic weight.

Security forces

Lebanese Armed Forces

The Lebanese Armed Forces is an important national institution that has often tried to portray itself as above sectarian politics. In the civil war, however, LAF brigades fragmented along confessional lines. After the war, the sectarian balance of forces has shifted in favour of Muslim sects to more accurately reflect demographic reality. Nonetheless, the post of Commander remains a Maronite Christian preserve.

Like many Lebanese state institutions, the LAF was largely controlled by Syria after the war. It has not engaged external military powers (Israel or Syria) either during or after the war, as it was neither armed nor supported by a unified political leadership to do so. It was largely a bystander in the Israel–Hezbollah war of 2006. Due to its lack of lethal weaponry, and in view of the continuing political strife, its role is confined to domestic peace enforcement and to anti-terrorist action, such as its defeat of the Islamist group Fatah al-Islam in the Palestinian camp of Nahr al-Bared in 2007.

Internal Security Forces

The ISF is the national police and security force of Lebanon. It remained under the control of Syrian security and intelligence forces from 1990 to 2005. It has been the subject of recent reform efforts and special attention from Sunni Prime Ministers.

International actors

France

The former colonial power, while remaining protective of its influence in the Levant, has worked closely with other Western powers (notably through **UNIFIL**) in sponsoring the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty. Under President Jacques Chirac (1995–2007) France had close ties with Rafiq al-Hariri, and along with the US promoted UNSC Resolution 1559 (September 2004) ordering the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. After Hariri's assassination, it gave strong support to the Siniora government and hosted donor conferences and inter-Lebanese political talks. France (with Qatar) sponsored the Doha Agreement between the 8 and 14 March Alliances.

Iran

Iran has sought to exert influence in Lebanon since long before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and has maintained close links with the Shia community based on the majority of the sect's submission to *wilāyat al-faqih* rule (the rule of the just cleric lawyer). Iran's interest in the Levant stems from a desire to become a regional power as well as its opposition to the state of Israel. To that effect Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah perform the role of proxies for Iranian regional policy. It has provided funding and training to Hezbollah since its creation in 1982, and has sent them technologically sophisticated armaments, especially since after the 2006 war.

Israel

Israel's relationship with Lebanon was seriously damaged by its armed conflict with the PLO after 1970 when the PLO settled in Lebanon. Israel held the Lebanese state responsible for Palestinian attacks from Lebanese territory. It invaded Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, and supported a proxy force in the south, the SLA. It finally withdrew from Southern Lebanon in 2000. Since then its interests in Lebanon have included securing its northern border and preventing Hezbollah attacks. Clashes between Israeli troops and Hezbollah in border areas between 2000 and 2006 escalated into the July 2006 war, in which Israel conducted military operations against targets in Lebanon, and which were condemned by many in the international community.

Issues of water sharing are also of great importance for Israel. Any solution depends heavily on Syrian-Israeli relations.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia partnered Syria in driving the 1989 Taif Accord, but generally the Saudi stance on Lebanon has been more closely aligned with Western powers and has been increasingly anti-Syrian. Its monarchy sponsored Sunni politician Rafiq al-Hariri, and strongly criticised Syria after his assassination. They maintain much influence with his son Saad al-Hariri. They also shelter and finance Sunni Salafi and Jihadist groups operating in the Levant, using Lebanon as an arena for their competition with Iran.

Syria

With deep historical and social ties to Lebanon, Syria remains the most important external reference point in Lebanese politics. It has only had formal diplomatic relations with Lebanon since 2008, reflecting what many saw as unwillingness to respect Lebanese sovereignty. There is an outstanding question of border demarcation that has yet to be resolved.

Syria was an important player throughout the Lebanese civil war, beginning in the 1975–76 phase when President Hafez al-Assad sided with the Christian rulers against the National Movement. Syrian troops entered Lebanon in 1976 and stayed until 2005. Along with Saudi Arabia, and with the agreement of the US, Syria drove the Taif Accord in 1989. The end of the war was the start of fifteen years of Syrian hegemony in Lebanese affairs. This ended in 2005 after Syria was suspected of the murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. It became the target of international isolation and UN-led investigations. When the focus of investigations shifted towards Hezbollah, the establishment of diplomatic ties in 2008 was the first move in a (largely cosmetic) Syrian-Lebanese rapprochement.

Syria backs the 8 March parties. The outcome of the 2011–12 uprising against the Syrian regime will have important ramifications for Lebanese politics.

US

The US has interests in the region beyond preserving Israeli security, including containing Islamist groups and countering Iranian-Syrian influence. The US has a long history of involvement in Lebanon, sending troops to intervene in the 1958 war and in 1982–84. Its interest in Lebanon's sovereignty was awakened in the 2000s with the Bush administration leading the 'war on terror'. In recent years it has strongly supported the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1559, the 14 March coalition and the creation of the STL.

The Arab League

The AL is the regional organisation for Arab states and currently has 22 members. It has been an important forum for negotiating the interests of Arab states at many points in history. The Syrian forces that intervened in Lebanon in 1976 were transformed into a peacekeeping force under AL auspices. The AL's influence in Lebanon is limited as long as Syria and Saudi Arabia support opposing factions.

European Union

EU countries are the destination for most of Lebanon's exports. Since 2007 support has been channelled through the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument. The EU's work in Lebanon includes supporting reform of the ISF as well as other reforms, and strengthening civil associations and trans-confessional activism.

United Nations

The UN Security Council has passed a number of resolutions on Lebanon. The US and France have been particularly active in recent years, pushing first for Syrian withdrawal and Hezbollah's disarmament in 2004 (Resolution 1559), and then for the establishment of an international tribunal to investigate Rafiq al-Hariri's assassination.

Two of the most important UN bodies in Lebanon are UNIFIL and UNWRA.

UNIFIL (the UN Interim Force in Lebanon) was created by the Security Council in March 1978 to affirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese government in restoring effective authority in the area. Its mandate has been adjusted in response to developments in 1982, 2000 and 2006. Critics have faulted UNIFIL for failing to secure Israeli withdrawal until 2000 and prevent mutual border infringements.

UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) has assisted and protected registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territories since the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. In Lebanon, it cares for more than 200,000 refugees whose future remains uncertain.

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Inaugurated in March 2009, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was established to bring those responsible for the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri to justice. Since its inception, it has been a divisive and potentially explosive factor in Lebanese politics.

The initial UN-led investigation was criticised for rushing to establish Syrian culpability for political reasons. With the adoption of a more low-key approach after that, the supporters of the 14 March Alliance were frustrated by the lack of progress within the Lebanese judicial system and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora requested the establishment of an international tribunal. The UN Secretary General reached a draft agreement with the Lebanese government and UNSC Resolution 1757 established the STL in 2007.

In 2011 members of Hezbollah were indicted and an arrest warrant issued.

Glossary

Alawites

A branch of Shia Islam centred in Syria, Alawites are recognised as one of Lebanon's 18 religious sects. They comprise less than 1 per cent of the population, based mainly in the north and the city of Tripoli.

Blue Line

A border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel drawn by the UN in June 2000 to determine whether Israel had fully withdrawn from Lebanon. The Blue Line differs from the international border of 1923 and the armistice line of 1949. It is to be replaced by a final border when Israel and Lebanon sign a peace treaty and the disputed territories of the Chebaa farms, Ghajar and Kfar-Shuba are settled.

Chouf

A historic mountainous region south of Beirut and now an administrative district. The Chouf is the heartland of the Lebanese Druze community. It was inhabited by a Christian majority, most of whom fled their villages during the civil war.

Confessions

There are 18 recognised confessional groups in Lebanon: 4 Muslim communities, 13 Christian communities, and a Jewish community today limited to a few dozen people. Each community manages its own internal affairs and rules concerning family and education issues.

The individual choice to follow secular rules was stipulated in the Constitution of 1926 but never adopted.

Confessionalism

The Lebanese form of consociationalism. As a political system, confessionalism distributes political and institutional power according to fixed quotas among religious communities (confessions). It is stipulated in the Constitution, the National Pact (see below) and the 1989 Taif Agreement. The Arabic name is *ta'ifiyya*.

Consociationalism

A system of government that allocates power between religious or ethnic communities. Its main features are: allocation of political posts among communities in proportion to their share of the population; power-sharing between community leaders in a 'grand coalition'; communal autonomy on affairs such as personal status laws; and mutual veto power, so that any community can vote out decisions it deems disadvantageous.

Druze

A monotheistic syncretic religious community, found primarily in Syria, Lebanon and Israel. The faith emerged during the eleventh century from a branch of Shia Islam. The Druze were for centuries the main pillar of the Lebanese emirate in the central areas of Mount Lebanon. Today the community remains loyal to its feudal leaders, the Jumblatt and Arslan dynasties. A non-proselyte and endogamic group, they constitute an estimated 5 per cent of the population.