

Extremist Christian Militia in Lebanon May Ignite a New Civil War

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In Ashrafieh, the wealthy Christian neighborhood in east Beirut, there is a group of 300 young, muscular, and bearded men patrolling the streets from 6 pm. to 6 am. as part of Neighborhood Watch, but they have an extremist Christian ideology which many have termed [neo-fascist](#). They call the group the [Soldiers of God](#), and its members refer to themselves as the Guardian Angels.

According to an investigation carried out by Lebanese army intelligence, the Soldiers of God participated in the October 2021 massacre of 7 people, and the injury of 32 others who were Hezbollah and Amal supporters in Tayouneh, a neighborhood in Beirut. The report specified the names of the Soldiers of God members who participated and their connection to the Societe Generale Bank Group (SGBL). The report also stated the person in charge of coordinating the massacre was [Lebanese Forces \(LF\) leader Samir Geagea's](#) head of security, Simon Musallam.

Lebanese security has deemed the Soldiers of God as a ["Christian extremist group that may pose a danger in the future."](#)



Who are the Soldiers of God?

They are an armed Christian militia tied to the Kataeb Party and the Lebanese Forces (LF) who have a long history of deadly violence during the Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990.

Some see the Soldiers of God simply as a Christian answer to Hezbollah. Sectarian divisions are dangerous in Lebanon, which is home to many religions and sects that formed the basis of the Lebanese civil war. The Lebanese people are concerned that a possible return to street battles between armed groups divided along sectarian lines might be the latest in a long string of disasters to hit Lebanon since 2019.

The group espouses a right-wing Christian ideology that is against secularism, communism, homosexual lifestyle, drugs, abortion, and civil marriage. They are active on social media but shy away from media interviews. While being based in Ashrafieh, they are known to be present in smaller numbers in Zahle, Jal El Dib, and Bourj Hammoud.

Who is funding the [annual budget of \\$330,000](#)?

The [Neighborhood Watch](#) is part of the Achrafieh 2020 civil organization, which was founded in 2012 by Member of Parliament, Nadim Gemayel, who is a member of the Kataeb party. His father was the President of Lebanon, Bashir Gemayel, until his 1982 assassination.

Bashir Gemayel had founded a Christian militia, the LF, which fought in the Lebanese civil war and received their training in Israel. The party is now supported by Saudi Arabia and led by Samir Geagea. The LF committed a [massacre of 3,500 Lebanese](#) citizens in 1982 in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps while their ally, Israel, guarded the perimeters.

Antoine Sehnaoui, (also spelled as [Anton Al-Sehnawi](#)) Chairman of the Board of Directors of SGBL, has been linked to the group as a source of funding; however, he has denied this. The Soldiers of God were founded by Joseph Mansour, an employee of SGBL, in 2020 and some of the group work for SGBL as security guards.

Are the Soldiers of God aligned with the ISF?

Representative [Paula Yacoubian](#) brought to light the curious case of a woman in Ashrafieh who was the victim of a home robbery. The woman called the local police to report the robbery, but it was the [Soldiers of God](#) who showed up at her door in response. The woman was so shocked that she reported the occurrence to her elected representative.

The General Directorate of the ISF issued a statement, in which it said that the matter was investigated and they did not find any interaction between the ISF and the Soldiers of God. The ISF has said they are against any type of vigilante group claiming to be providing security. Lebanon's public security sector is underfunded and some have tried to justify the Soldiers of God as an additional source of security off the public payroll.

Achrafieh 2020 Secretary, [Akram Nehme](#), said recently "First, we're not in a war situation. Second, we are in complete coordination with the police, the Mukhabarat (intelligence agencies), and all the necessary authorities that are needed to do our activity."

The Soldiers of God are supporters of the Kataeb Party and the LF and are opposed to Hezbollah and all refugees in Lebanon, such as Palestinians and Syrians.

Gemayel and Geagea

Samir Geagea is a Lebanese politician and militia commander who now leads the LF as a political party, following its demilitarization in 1986. Recently, [Geagea](#) said, "They are saying that they want a president who protects the back of the resistance, but do we need a president who would protect Hezbollah's back, or do we need him to protect the back of the Lebanese?"

Geagea was referring to criticism directed at Hezbollah which some claim has prevented the election of a new President of Lebanon. The former President, Michel Aoun, had aligned his

office with Hezbollah. Aoun was a former General during the civil war, and despite being Christian, he valued Hezbollah's ability to defend Lebanon's southern border while the national army was underfunded and lacked the weapons needed for security.

The Soldiers of God are loyal to the parties of Gemayel and Geagea. In the aftermath of the [Tayouneh](#) massacre, 68 people have been charged, with 47 of them being charged with "murder, attempted murder, inciting sectarian strife and forming an armed gang," while 20 others are charged with "murder, attempted murder and possession of weapons without a license."



The Lebanese Civil War

During the period from 1975 to 1990, an estimated 120,000 people died in the [Lebanese civil war](#), with another 1 million who left the country. Lebanon is very diverse. There are the Christians: Maronite Catholic, Roman Catholic, Armenian, Greek Catholic, and Syrian Orthodox. Then the Muslims: Sunni and Shiite. The Druze are a sizeable community as well. At one time in history, the Christians outnumbered the others, but in recent times the Muslims became the majority.

During the French mandate of 1920-1943, the political system and parliament became sectarian. This focus on identity-based on religious terms laid the framework for the civil war, where each community had an armed militia and they turned the country into a warzone.

In 1989 the Taif agreement began the process of the end of the civil war. In 1991 all the militias were to be dissolved which the exception of Hezbollah and the Lebanese army was to begin rebuilding itself as the sole non-sectarian armed group. However, this never materialized and the southern border of Lebanon is protected by Hezbollah, much to the dismay of many Lebanese who wish there were only state institutions for defense and security.

The Lebanese people are worried that sectarian violence may be increasing and the flames of civil war may be fanned by the Soldiers of God, and their ties to the warlords, militias, and parties who participated in the Lebanese civil war. This is part one of a two-part series explaining Lebanon's position currently as a failed state.

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