

The Israeli Attack on South Lebanon and Al Aqsa Crisis

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Global Research, April 17, 2023

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

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The Palestinian resistance group Hamas attacked Israel with rockets coming from South Lebanon on April 6. The resistance was responding to the repeated attacks on Palestinians praying inside the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem during the holy month of Ramadan.

Extremist Jewish settlers had insisted on going to the Mosque, against long standing traditions, which provoked tensions and the Israeli police used brutal tactics on the Palestinians praying, including beating women and arresting 400.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's extremist government opposes the creation of a Palestinian state and supports the expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, which emboldened the fanatical settlers who went to the Mosque.

On April 7, Israeli air strikes hit southern Lebanon in retaliation, marking the biggest escalation between Israel and Lebanon in almost 20 years. There were no casualties reported from either side after the tit-for-tat strikes. Hamas is supported by Hezbollah, the Lebanese resistance group.

The US State Department condemned the attack on Israel, and said Israel had the right to defend itself against all attacks. No mention of the right for Palestinians to pray inside their own Mosque during a religious period. The US supports only the rights of Jews, and the Christian and Muslim Palestinians are left defenseless.

Samir Geagea, whose Christian Lebanese Forces (LF) often battled Palestinian fighters in the civil war, denounced the attack and Fouad Abu Nader, another former LF commander, called for the arrest of the Hamas leader.

Israel and the US have used Lebanon as a stage to fight proxy wars in. The creation of Israel in 1948 caused a huge influx of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and after so many years

without any Palestinian rights being restored; those old problems persist for the entire Middle East, which is held hostage by the Apartheid state of Israel.

Past Israeli attacks and occupation of Lebanon

On April 10, 1973, two years before the civil war erupted, an Israeli commando team led Ehud Barak, invaded Beirut and killed three top officials from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in their homes. Several Lebanese policemen and guards were also killed in the crime.

The raid enflamed divisions between the Lebanese supporters, and the opponents of the PLO, which had been in Lebanon since 1970.

The Lebanese army clashed with Palestinian freedom fighters less than a month later, which developed into the 1975-1990 civil war, during which the Israeli army invaded the south of Lebanon, and the brutal military occupation lasted until 2000.

It was the rise of Hezbollah that was responsible for the Israeli withdrawal. In the summer of 2006, US President Bush and Sec. of State Condoleezza Rice, supported the Israeli attack on Lebanon to destroy Hezbollah. Much of the most vital civilian infrastructure in Lebanon was destroyed by the air raids, and more than 1,000 Lebanese were killed, while hundreds of thousands were made homeless. In the end, Israel was unable to enter Lebanon, and Hezbollah was proven to be the only force able to protect the Lebanese border from invasion and occupation.

Saudi-Iran full diplomatic relationship restored

The surprise agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia signed on March 10 may hold the key political reconciliation in Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia has traditionally supported the Lebanese Sunni politicians, such as the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and his son PM Saad Hariri. However, Saad Hariri resigned himself from political life.

With Saudi Arabia supporting Sunni politicians and Iran backing the Shiite group Hezbollah, the long-standing rivalry between the two has shaped the political scene in Lebanon. The newly found reconciliation between Riyadh and Tehran may set the stage in Lebanon for compromise.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has a Vision 2030, which depends on peace and prosperity in Saudi Arabia and the region.

Prior to the March 10 agreement, Hezbollah supported Maronite Christian Suleiman Frangieh for president.

Riyadh has not come out publically in support of any one name in the contest, and has taken the position that Lebanon should decide alone.

The office of president in Lebanon has been left vacant since October 2022, and the process of the election depends on a candidate garnering the required votes from parliament members, which on repeated rounds of voting never concluded with a majority.

Saudi Arabia was once a major investor in the country mainly in the luxury tourism industry, but fundamental issues must be resolved before large-scale investments return.

The US is opposed to the Saudi-Iran détente. The chaos and conflict between the two regional powerhouses served the US interests and was in line with the Israeli foreign policy for its neighbors: namely to keep them at war with each other.

Presidential office is vacant

Politicians are deadlocked over the election of a new president, in a multiparty republic with a parliament. The Prime Minister must be Sunni, the President must be Maronite, and the Speaker of the Parliament must be Shiite.

The current population is almost 5.5 million, with 31.9 % Sunni, 31% Shiite, and 32.4 % Christian.

Lebanon was founded in 1920 from a small portion of Syria, under French administration, and finally independence in 1943.

Central Bank Chief accused of Money Laundering

Marwan Kheireddine, CEO of Lebanese bank Al Mawarid, was indicted in France last month as part of the French investigation into embezzlement of more than \$330 million by Lebanon's central bank governor, Riad Salameh, and his brother Raja.

"I confirm that Marwan Kheireddine has been indicted for aggravated money laundering charges and participation in a criminal conspiracy, and placed under judicial supervision as part of the judicial investigation opened in France, targeting notably embezzlement at the Central Bank of Lebanon," prosecutor Antoine Jockey-Monrozier said.

Riad Salameh has been accused by many countries in Europe of money laundering involving his girlfriend Anna Kosakova as well as his brother Raja.

In January, Kheireddine was questioned by European investigators in relation to some accounts, which reportedly began with an initial investment of \$15 million, and grew to \$150 million.

Lebanese judge Jean Tannous wrote, "Riad Salameh entrusted his brother Raja Salameh in 1993 with an amount of \$15 million" in violation of the Code of Money and Credit, "which prohibits the governor from retaining any stake in a private company".

Financial crisis and starvation

The economic crisis in Lebanon has been described by the World Bank as one of the worst in history and was caused by years of mismanagement by political leaders and their corruption. The local currency has lost over 99 % of its value against the US dollar with banks still locking people out of their deposits.

Four in 10 Lebanese and Syrian refugee children currently face high acute food insecurity, with Lebanon the sixth worst food crisis globally.

Families are forced to skip meals or reduce the number of nutritious meals for their children.

IMF mission Chief Ernesto Rigo said in Beirut that the authorities should accelerate the implementation of conditions set for a \$3 billion bailout.

Lebanon inflation hit 190% in February as IMF calls for urgent reforms, which has seen three-quarters of the population into poverty and almost no electricity.

Rigo said, "This inaction disproportionately harms the low-to-middle-income population and undermines Lebanon's long-term economic potential. The government, parliament, and the Central Bank must act together, rapidly and decisively to tackle long-standing institutional and structural weaknesses to stabilize the economy and pave the way for a strong and sustainable recovery."

Lebanon signed an agreement with the IMF nearly one year ago, but has not taken the necessary steps to secure the funding for recovery.

Salameh is still the central bank manager, and many of the same warlords and political elites who caused the financial collapse of the country through their corruption are charged with fixing a system they destroyed.

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This article was originally published on [Mideast Discourse](#).

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