

SOCIETY FOR
CULTURAL
ANTHROPOLOGY

Editors' Forum **Hot Spots**

The Lebanese Front of the War for Palestine

FROM THE SERIES: [Another Season of War in Lebanon](#)



Ramia, South Lebanon. February 2025. Photo by Munira Khayyat.

By [Nathaniel George](#)

April 11, 2025

Publication Information

Cite As: George, Nathaniel. 2025. "The Lebanese Front of the War for Palestine." Hot Spots, *Fieldsights*, April 11. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/the-lebanese-front-of-the-war-for-palestine>

On October 8, 2023, Hizballah surprised many observers by launching its support front against Israel, targeting Israeli military positions in occupied Lebanese territory. Israel characteristically responded with far greater force across south Lebanon more generally, against both military and civilian targets. Israeli strikes have since [killed more than 4,200 people](#) in Lebanon, caused over 17,000 injuries with life-altering effects, and at its peak, displaced an estimated 1.3 million people over the subsequent 17 months, mostly after Israel's escalation of its war in mid-September 2024. As in Palestine, the history of Zionist colonialism in Lebanon does not start on October 8, 2023. This short piece contextualizes anticolonial resistance in Lebanon in a longer perspective.

Israel has attacked Lebanese sovereignty since its foundation in the 1948 Nakba, when Zionist forces occupied for the better part of a year a number of border villages, expelling their residents and committing large scale massacres (see Figure 1). Furthermore, seven villages that began the post-Ottoman era as part of the French mandate "Greater Lebanon" and were later shifted to British mandate Palestine were [ethnically cleansed in 1948](#) and became Israeli-occupied territory. Israel pushed some 120,000 Palestinian refugees into Lebanon at the same time: they and their descendants remain in dismal conditions and denied political rights. After the 1949 Armistice Agreement, Israeli intervention in and aggression against Lebanon continued at a lower level, in the form of political and material support for pro-government loyalists in the [1958 civil war](#), and in persistent attempts to [gain access](#) to or [divert waters](#) from the Litani and Hasbani Rivers, long coveted by Zionist colonial planners.



Figure 1. A memorial in Hula, Lebanon, commemorating the massacre committed by the Israeli army there in October 1948, defaced by occupying Israeli troops in October or November 2024. The Hebrew graffiti reportedly reads, “A good Shi’i is a dead Shi’i. Golani [Brigade].” Source: X user, [ireallyhateyou](#).

In the late 1960s, following the rise of the [Palestinian Revolution](#) and the [Lebanese National Movement's](#) anticolonial resistance, Israel carried out thousands of provocative and

disproportionate attacks in Lebanon. These included a long political assassination [campaign](#) of Palestinian resistance leaders based in the country. Despite the known identity of the killers, who include former Israeli Prime Minister [Ehud Barak](#), no international legal investigation of these cases has been pursued. Lebanese state authorities have long had an equivocal response to such actions: Israel even took up military positions in Lebanon unopposed by the government as early as 1970.

Beyond such direct Israeli actions, Israel has also backed the most extreme counterrevolutionary, Christian supremacist, pro-Western, and anti-Palestinian forces in Lebanon's long international civil war, such as the Lebanese Forces, the [Guardians of the Cedars](#), and the [Front for the Liberation of Lebanon from Foreigners](#). This included direct support for [what the UN has called "acts of genocide"](#)—specifically, the infamous September 1982 massacre of some 3,000 unarmed Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in the Sabra & Shatila areas of Beirut. Lebanese nationalist forces have long been vexed by the question of how to relate to Israel. Violent disagreements have broken out within their coalition between the proponents and critics of an alliance with Israel, whether implicit or explicit. This political divide is still reflected today, for instance, in the divisions between the Lebanese Forces and the Marada Movement, predominantly Maronite Christian political parties allied to the U.S.-Israeli-GCC normalization project and the Iranian-supported Resistance Axis, respectively.

After initial flailing attempts to raise a competent, subordinate Lebanese militia to police resistance in southern Lebanon since 1976, Israel directly invaded and occupied Lebanon south of the Litani river from 1978–2000. The Israeli occupation was marked by checkpoints, pervasive surveillance, rituals of humiliation, arbitrary and political incarceration, torture, forced displacement, family separation, as well as sectarian divide and rule (see Figures 2 and 3). There is, clearly, widespread and deep opposition to a long history of Israeli settler colonialism and aggression in Lebanon. The territory Israel controlled expanded and receded a few times over those harsh decades, particularly in the wake of its massive invasion of 1982 and subsequent retreat to its "security belt" in 1985 in the face of [widespread resistance](#). Israel conducted further major campaigns against Lebanon in 1993, 1996, 2006, and again since 2023.



Figure 2: Lebanese displaced from the south by Israel's March 1978 invasion. Photo by J.C. Francolon. Source: *Liban Nouveau: Bulletin de l'Association France-Nouveau Liban*, no. 2, April 1978.



Figure 3: Lebanese displaced from the south by Israel's March 1978 invasion. Source: *Liban Nouveau: Bulletin de l'Association France-Nouveau Liban*, no. 2, April 1978.

Anti-Zionist resistance in Lebanon has been carried out by a wide range of people and organizations across the years, from former Ottoman officers to secular Arab nationalists, socialists, Marxists, and later, Islamists. As scholars such as Malek and Rula Jurdi Abisaab [have shown](#), it is a mistake to overemphasize the boundaries between such ideological movements: loyalties were often fluid and at times overlapping. All these movements were anticolonial responses to modern imperial, narrow nationalist, and settler colonial interventions. Such structural factors, as well as contingent developments on the local, regional, and international levels have produced several significant paradigm shifts over the decades. Resistance partisans have hailed from all areas of the country—and [beyond](#)—and have been drawn from all [gender](#) and religious backgrounds. This deep legacy of anticolonial mobilizations and their supporting constituencies provided the foundation that consolidated into the formidable armed political movement that is Hizballah. The more fundamental distinction separates the supporters of anticolonial resistance from those who oppose it.

A key driver of that political division is Lebanon's sectarian regime, which actively and incessantly facilitates the fragmentation of society into allegedly incommensurable, hostile communities defined by religious difference. Notably in the case at hand, the sectarian regime has historically underrepresented Shi'i Muslims to the advantage of Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims. Shi'is make up the majority of the state's underdeveloped southern periphery bordering occupied Palestine, historically known as Jabal 'Amil, and have therefore borne the brunt of Israeli aggressions, occupations, and forced [displacements](#). Moreover, as we have seen, belligerent Israeli actions in Lebanon have often been welcomed by forces eager to capitalize on the setbacks of their perceived competitors. Successive postindependence governments neither prioritized rural development nor defense against Israel, and these decisions pushed many rural southerners into [oppositional movements](#) over the long term, whether the Lebanese Communist Party, Palestinian *fida'i* formations, or Hizballah.

The assassination of Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah along with much of Hizballah's top leadership, the sabotage of Hizballah's supply chain and information security, the destruction and depopulation of much of the frontier villages, as well as the overthrow of the allied Asad regime in Syria has dealt Hizballah and the Resistance Axis severe setbacks. These will

have unexpected repercussions. Yet as in Gaza, Israel's larger goals of pacifying Lebanon militarily and controlling its international relations—for that is what its policies add up to—remain elusive.

Israel has previously attempted everything they are presently trying to achieve in Lebanon—and failed miserably. The assassination of resistance leaders has eventually led to more effective and determined successors. The collective punishment of Lebanese society has reduced open sympathy for Israel and the United States while boosting the plausibility of armed self-defense. Attempts to push resistance forces behind a particular location, such as the Litani River, have repeatedly failed. Meanwhile, those same military forces' strategic depth has expanded. Israel's reliance on air superiority has failed to eliminate any resistance group. Ground invasions have led to the embarrassment of the region's most vaunted troops. The occupation of a "security belt" along the frontier brought unsustainable losses on fixed positions as well as increased legitimacy for the resistance. The fomenting of internal strife, civil war, and the deputization of Lebanese collaborators has forged a more committed and organized resistance while progressively discrediting the option of open collaboration. Coordination with the United States to install a collaborationist president, namely Bashir Gemayel in August 1982, was met with his prompt assassination and a dilution of his agenda by his successor (and brother). And finally, the imposition of an agreement with the Lebanese government allowing de facto Israeli sovereignty in Lebanon, as in May 1983, was soon brought down through popular and international resistance. With the strength of philo-colonial Lebanese groups at a historic low, and the formidable organization and institutionalization of anticolonial forces, there is little reason to foresee any of these available tools being successfully deployed today. More realistically, the Israelis can only hope to achieve a temporary degradation of these forces—a strategy their own military leaders and intellectuals have dehumanizingly referred to as "[mowing the lawn](#)."

As in other protracted anticolonial struggles, resistance forces only need to survive to credibly claim victory against a vastly more powerful aggressor. In the long run, the strength of anticolonial forces has ultimately grown with every successive Israeli aggression. These repeated episodes have steadily distorted the lives of more and more people, acts of political education that have steadily chipped away at the philo-colonial theory that "Lebanon's strength is in its weakness" (*quwwat Lubnan fi ḍa'ifihi*). Even Israelis have absorbed some lessons. When asked why Netanyahu opted for the November 27, 2024 ceasefire, Yaakov Amidror, a Washington-based Israeli think-tank analyst and former

national security adviser to the ICC-indicted prime minister told the *Financial Times* that “Lebanon is too big. [Hizbollah is too strong](#).”

Other Israeli officials immediately described the November ceasefire as “a ceasefire, not an end to the war.” By March 2025, Israel has since fulfilled such threats that it would ultimately sideline the agreements it concluded with both Lebanon’s government and Hamas in Gaza—with the full backing of the United States, the dishonest broker of both settlements. The ultimate meaning of this ongoing confrontation will only be revealed with time. Yet if the structural conditions of sectarian political and economic inequality continue to combine with Western sponsorship of official Lebanese submission to settler colonial and genocidal Zionism, Jabal ‘Amil can be expected to host anticolonial forces with strong international alliances organized to counter such intolerable arrangements. Lebanon’s fate is inseparable from Palestine.

[Back to Series Description](#)

SOCIETY FOR
CULTURAL
ANTHROPOLOGY



Sign up for our mailing list

Email

[Subscribe](#)