

## Lebanon (1975 - 1990)



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Lebanon began 15 years of civil war in 1975. The fighting was originally between a largely Maronite Christian force and an alliance of Muslim and left-wing groups, but the conflict soon expanded. Syria's army intervened in 1976, and the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) intervened against Palestinian groups living in southern Lebanon, first in 1978 and then again in 1982. Although the fighting spread throughout the country, the capital, Beirut, was particularly devastated. As the war progressed, intra-group fighting added to the death toll. The conflict killed an estimated 150,000 people - nearly 5% of Lebanon's population - before it officially came to an end under a peace plan negotiated by the Arab League in 1990.

Prior to the war, Lebanon's "confessional system" of government protected minority rights and created separate civil codes for the diverse religious communities: Shia and Sunni Muslims, Druze, Maronite Christians, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenians, and others. The government was centralized, favoring Beirut over the rural areas, and sought neutrality in Middle Eastern politics. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, sectarian and economic tensions rose between Lebanese Christians and Muslims, and these were exacerbated by the influx of Palestinian refugees. In 1975, a series of clashes between a Maronite paramilitary force called the Phalangists and Muslim and leftist groups erupted into full-scale civil war. The two main warring parties were the Lebanese Front (LF), comprised of Christian paramilitary forces, and the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), made up of Druze, socialist, and Muslim paramilitary forces. The Lebanese Army split along religious lines.

Syrian troops entered Lebanon in 1976 and remained until 2005. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) arrived in 1978, initially to facilitate the partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. In 1982, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) again invaded, holding Beirut under siege for 70 days and leaving an estimated 18,000 people dead. Under a US-brokered agreement, the IDF then withdrew to the south where with its Phalangist allies it continued to clash with the Palestinians and the Iranian-backed Shia militant group Hizbollah. In September 1982, 700 to 1,000 Palestinian men, women and children were massacred by Phalangists in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. A Multinational Force (MNF), comprised of U.S., French, Italian, and British troops, came in 1982 to oversee the withdrawal of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Lebanon. The MNF departed in early 1984, a few months after hundreds of U.S. marines were killed in the bombing of their barracks in Beirut.

In 1989, the Arab League negotiated a ceasefire and the Taif Accord which was accepted by Muslim and Christian parliamentarians. Syrian troops guaranteed the agreement by attacking the forces of General Michel Aoun, who had set up a separate government in east Beirut and refused to adhere to the peace plan. A new government of national reconciliation was created, with parity between Christians and Muslims. By 1991 all the militias except Hizbollah and an Israeli-supported force in the south had been disarmed. Lebanon focused on rebuilding and development; there were no efforts to hold individuals accountable for their actions during the civil war. Sectarian tensions remained, and sporadic clashes still occur. The IDF continued to occupy portions of southern Lebanon until 2000, arguing that they were protecting Israel from Hizbollah. In July 2006 a brief but intense war again broke out between the IDF and Hizbollah, causing

an estimated 1500 casualties, most of them Lebanese civilians, and causing large-scale population displacements.

#### *Print Resources*

O'Ballance, Edgar (1998) *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975 - 92*. London: Macmillan.

Rabil, Robert G. (2003) *Embattled Neighbors: Syria, Israel, and Lebanon*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Fisk, Robert (1990) *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*. London: André Deutsch.

#### *Online Resources*

BBC News. *Country Profile: Lebanon*.

Reuters Alertnet. *Lebanon*.

Global Security. *Lebanon (Civil War, 1975-1991)*.

#### *Timeline*

1975 - clashes in Beirut mark start of civil war

1976 - Syria sends troops; "Green Line" divides Christian, Muslim Beirut

1978 - PLO attacks Israel; Israel invades south Lebanon; UNIFIL deployed

1982 - Israel invades Lebanon, lays siege to Beirut for 70 days; Phalangists massacre Palestinian refugees at Sabra and Shatila camps; MNF deployed in Beirut

1983 - 241 U.S. marines and 56 French paratroopers killed in bombings in October, for which Shia militants claim responsibility

1984 - MNF pulls out; Syria offers settlement through Bikfayya Agreement

1985 - TWA flight hijacked by Hizbollah; rival Christian factions fight in Beirut

1986 - Shia and Druze clashes in Beirut put down by Syrian troops

1987 - death of Prime Minister creates competing governments in east, west Beirut

1988 - General Aoun expels Beirut militias, fights Syrians

1989 - Arab League negotiates ceasefire; Muawad elected president, assassinated; Hrawi named president; Aoun refuses to recognize Hrawi, fighting continues

1990 - Syrians oust Aoun; Taif Agreement creates government of national reconciliation

1991 - all militias except Hizbollah and pro-Israel South Lebanon Army disarmed