



FROM PALESTINE TO LEBANON: ISRAEL'S EXPANSIONIST PLAN

APRIL 2026

EXPLAINER

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It's not uncommon for Israel to be waging campaigns of violence against Palestinians whilst simultaneously carrying out acts of aggression against Lebanon and the Lebanese people. The history of Lebanon and the history of the Palestinian struggle have been closely intertwined, and this is not by accident. Often portrayed by Israel as a necessary security response, it reveals, in fact, a core driver of the Zionist project, illustrating its regional colonial scope and expansionist ambitions, and in turn, how resistance has also become regionalised. Here are five key things you need to know:

01

Lebanon is Israel's second major target

Since Israel's genocidal campaign against Gaza in October 2023, Lebanon has been the second most significant target of Israel's military violence, with thousands killed and injured, and over one million people displaced.

02

Israel's interest in Lebanon is long standing, not reactive

Since 1948, Lebanon has been deeply entangled in Palestinian dispossession due to mass refugee displacement, Israeli military violence, and the longterm political and social impact of the Palestinian presence.

03

Resistance in Lebanon was shaped by occupation

Israel's invasions, occupation, and repeated violence helped produce and strengthen resistance in Lebanon, showing how opposition to Zionism became increasingly regional.

04

Israel has been a central force in Lebanon's wars and instability

From the civil war to repeated invasions, occupation, and massacres, Israel has played a decisive role in shaping Lebanon's modern history, often in alliance with anti-Palestinian forces.

05

Today's escalation reflects a broader expansionist project

Israel's current attacks on Lebanon are part of a wider regional strategy rooted in settler colonial expansion, partly dating back to the 20th century vision of a "Greater Israel".

EARLY ZIONISM AND LEBANON

Zionism's interest in Lebanon is not recent nor is it incidental. From the outset, Zionist planners included parts of southern Lebanon within their vision of "Israel". Early proposals by the World Zionist Organisation's (WZO) argued that the Jewish national home should extend to "the northern and southern banks of the Litani River," and its 1919 map staking a claim to historic Palestine included this territory.



The Litani River, stretching 170 kilometres from the Beqaa Valley to the Mediterranean Sea north of Tyre, has long been central to these ambitions.

The WZO, originally founded as the Zionist Organisation (ZO) in 1897, has been the primary international organising body for the Zionist movement since its establishment. Its interest in – and claims to – the south of Lebanon, up to the Litani River, are therefore highly significant, reflecting not a fringe opinion, but a core historical ambition.

From its earliest stages, Zionist planning was closely tied to the control of natural resources, specifically water. As early as 1905, proposals were put forward to divert the Litani river southward, driven by concerns that the Jordan River basin would be insufficient to meet the water needs of expanding Zionist colonial settlement.

In 1919, Chaim Weizmann, then head of the WZO and later Israel's first president, argued at the Paris Peace Conference that the Litani was essential to a future Jewish state and that Lebanon could do without it.

This early history is significant. It situates Israel's interest in Lebanon not as a matter of recent security concerns, but within a longer trajectory of Zionist settler expansion where territorial ambition and resource extraction are deeply intertwined.

THE NAKBA AND LEBANON

Lebanon had gained independence in 1943.

Five years later, following the Nakba and the establishment of Israel, Lebanon's history became inseparable from that of the Palestinian people. The Nakba – the historic colonial dispossession and ethnic cleansing that accompanied the creation of the state of Israel – forced up to 120,000 Palestinian refugees into Lebanon. They were spread across 15 refugee camps, three of which were later destroyed between 1975-1990.

For communities in southern Lebanon, this marked an early and direct encounter with the violence underpinning Zionism and Israel's statehood. The impact was not confined to Palestinians alone; the entire region was drawn into the consequences of the colonial partition of historic Palestine.

The reality of Israel's military violence was taken to bloody lengths just five months after Israel's establishment. In October 1948, Israeli forces entered the village of Hula, on the southern side of the Litani river. They expelled the women and children and killed most of the boys and men – some as young as 15. In total, 58 people were killed. The Hula massacre marked Israel's first invasion of Lebanon, foreshadowing a longer pattern of military violence that would come to define its relationship with the country in the decades that followed.

Meanwhile, the refugee population that arrived in 1948 remained. Today,



it numbers around half a million people, spread across 12 refugee camps. Palestinian refugees are an integral part of Lebanon's social and political fabric, shaping – and being shaped, by the country's modern history.

By the 1950s and 1960s, Lebanon was also being reshaped by wider regional transformations. Within the country, political and ideological divisions emerged, falling along two currents.

One saw Lebanon as part of wider anti-imperialist and pan-Arab struggles for self-determination and sovereignty, and understood the Palestinian struggle against Zionism as central to that vision. The other emphasised Lebanon's distinct history, culture and future, often aligning more closely with Western powers. Within this landscape, the Palestinian cause – and the presence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon – occupied a complex and contested position.

ISRAEL AND THE LEBANON CIVIL WAR

By the 1970s, Lebanese society was marked by rapid urbanisation, internal migration and deepening inequality, often across sectarian lines. Muslims made up 75% of the industrial working class, while Christians dominated the commercial and banking sectors. These divisions created fertile ground for political tension, which was further inflamed by elite fear-mongering targeting poor migrants, Palestinian refugees, and the predominantly working class Shi'a population.

Amid rising chauvinism – particularly towards Palestinians – in the spring of 1975, violent clashes started to escalate between various political forces, including the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the Christian right-wing Phalange. The LNM was strongly allied with the Palestinian struggle and was composed of a variety of Lebanese groups fighting against the class divisions within Lebanese society and against the sectarian Lebanese political system that was set up by the French Mandate, which privileged Christians through the logic of minority alliances.

Hostility towards Palestinians hardened as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) established a base in Lebanon in the early 1970s, with the agreement of the Lebanese military. This presence provoked acts of aggression and violations of Lebanese sovereignty by Israel. In April 1973, Israeli forces carried out a seaborne invasion on Beirut and assassinated

three PLO leaders, and killing a number of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians.

The war is often framed purely as a civil war between different segments of Lebanese society, but this obscures the extent to which it was heavily driven by foreign imperialist and Zionist machinations.

The LNM was a coalition of leftist, secular, and reformist parties which included:

Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)

A socialist party rooted in the Druze community, playing a leading role in organising opposition to Lebanon's sectarian order

Lebanese Communist Party (LCP)

A Marxist-Leninist party that mobilised workers, peasants, and intellectuals. Closely aligned with Palestinian factions, it advocated for secular, class-based reform

Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)

A secular, pan-Syrian nationalist party calling for a "Greater Syria." Militarily active, with shifting alliances, often aligning with pro-Syrian forces

Amal Movement

A Shi'a political and militia movement that emerged in the 1970s to represent historically marginalised Shi'a communities

ISRAEL AND THE LEBANON CIVIL WAR

This intervention escalated in 1978 with Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon under "Operation Litani". Presented as an effort to dislodge the PLO and halt cross border operations, the underlying goal, however, was far more extensive. Over the course of a single week, around 2,000 Lebanese and Palestinians were killed, and approximately 250,000 people were displaced. Although Israel withdrew following a United Nations Security Council resolution, it left behind a proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), to maintain its influence, working in coordination with right wing forces such as the Phalange to achieve the objectives of expelling the PLO from Lebanon.

When this strategy failed to eliminate the PLO, Israel launched a far more extensive invasion in 1982. Israeli forces advanced all the way to Beirut, killing at least 20,000 people. Electricity, water, and food supplies were cut, while widespread bombings of the city killed hundreds of civilians, often under the guise of a "targeted" assassination of a PLO leader or the destruction of "PLO infrastructure".

These tactics - siege, largescale air bombing campaigns, and so-called "targeted" assassinations and "targeted" dismantling of "terrorist" infrastructure - which in practice meant widespread destruction, reflected a broader pattern of colonial military strategy that would later be deployed against Palestinians elsewhere.

In August 1982, an agreement was reached for the PLO to withdraw from Lebanon. Just one month later, with the PLO gone and the Palestinian refugee camps left unprotected, the Israeli military surrounded the Sabra and Shatila camps in West Beirut, permitting the Phalange forces to enter the camps and kill up to 3,500 Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilians. The Sabra and Shatila massacres were subsequently taken as a lesson by resistance forces about the dangers of disarmament.

1978

Operation Litani

Israeli forces occupied Lebanese territory right up until the Litani River, killing around 2,000 Lebanese and Palestinians over the course of a single week and displacing around 250,000 people.

1982

Invasion of Beirut

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August 1982

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September 1982

Sabra and Shatila Massacre

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THE FORMATION AND RISE OF HIZBALLAH

The foundations of Hizballah were laid during the 1982 invasion and occupation of Lebanon. Shi'i Muslims had long been politically and economically disenfranchised within the Lebanese state and at the outset of the civil war, some began to organise in small localised armed groups for protection.

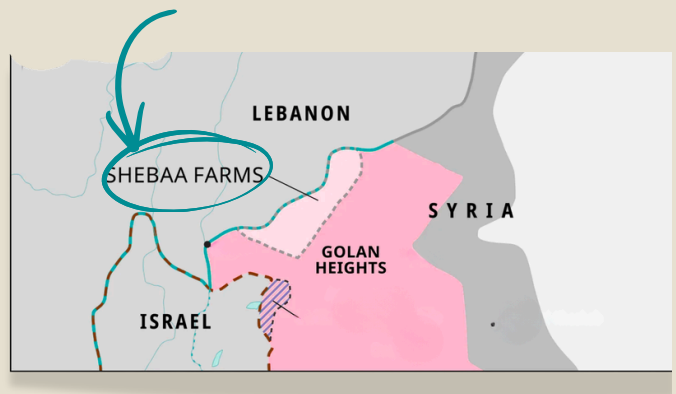
But it was Israel's 1982 invasion and the Sabra and Shatila massacres which propelled young Shi'is to arm themselves more systematically as resistance forces against the Israelis, particularly in the south where the Shi'i population was highly concentrated.

This was done in a more disconnected way until 1984, when Hizballah was founded. The group officially announced its existence in 1985, based on a commitment to Islamic resistance and anti-imperialism and having incorporated many Shi'is who had until then also participated in socialist and communist politics. The context for Hizballah's establishment, therefore, was one of occupation and socio-political disenfranchisement.

Importantly, even though Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon in 1985, they continued to occupy parts of the south. Hizballah, alongside other resistance groups, took a leading role in the fight against this ongoing occupation. Villages in the occupied south were effectively blocked off from the rest of the country, while Israel's violence extended well beyond the occupied zone.

Throughout the 1990s, Israel carried out repeated attacks across Lebanon. In 1993, more than one hundred civilians were killed in a week long Israeli attack. Air bombardments targeted Beirut in 1996, 1999 and 2000. In April 1996, the Israeli military bombed a United Nations bunker in Qana, where 800 civilians had taken shelter, killing 106 people. Despite sustained Israeli aggression, resistance was steady and unyielding, increasing the financial and political costs for Israel. In 2000, after 22 years of occupation, Israel withdrew from the vast majority of Lebanon.

However, to this day, Israel continues to occupy the Shebaa Farms, an area of around 15 square miles along the border.



THE 2006 WAR

Following the 2000 liberation, Hizballah and Israel maintained a delicate balance of force. However, this period was marked by continued border violations, the vast majority of which, according to the UN, were carried out by Israel. Hizballah's strategy during these years shifted to low-level conflict and targeted operations aimed at securing the release of Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners, including a successful exchange in 2004.

In July 2006, a Hizballah operation killed three Israeli soldiers, wounded two, and captured two others, with the goal of negotiating another prisoner exchange. This operation occurred in the context of escalating Israeli violence in Gaza: one month earlier, Israel had assassinated Jamal Abu Samhadana, founder of the Popular Resistance Committees, and launched a broader assault on the territory. Israel used Hizballah's operation as a pretext to initiate a full scale war on Lebanon.

The war lasted 33 days. Israel launched an extensive military campaign targeting not only Hizballah's leadership and infrastructure, but also its broader social base, together with widespread attacks against civilian infrastructure and to pressure the Lebanese government.

Later investigations revealed that Israel's military had been preparing for a large scale war against Lebanon months before Hizballah's operation, with the objective

of defeating the organisation. Over the course of the war, Israel killed around 1,200 people and thousands more were wounded. Approximately half a million people were displaced, and Israel inflicted an estimated \$3 billion in infrastructural damage on the country. Entire villages in southern Lebanon were flattened, while roads, bridges, runways, power plants, sewage treatment facilities, ports, gas stations, cell phone towers, factories and wheat silos were destroyed across the country.

Dahiya Doctrine

The war also saw the implementation of the infamous "Dahiya Doctrine", the deliberate and systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure as military strategy. Named after the Beirut suburb of Dahiya, where entire neighbourhoods were flattened during the 2006 war, the doctrine aimed to destroy the social base of resistance, punish support for resistance, and turn populations against resistance movements.

2023 AND AFTER

In the years following 2006, Hizballah and Israel maintained a balance of force, with the 2006 war demonstrating Hizballah's ability to withstand and respond to Israeli aggression. This balance shifted in 2023.

Following the Hamas-led operation on 7 October and the start of Israel's genocidal campaign against the Gaza Strip, Hizballah opened up what it called a "support front" in solidarity with Gaza on the 8 October. The aim was to draw some Israeli military resources and attention away from Gaza and maintain a degree of pressure against Israel from the north.

Israel, however, saw this as an opportunity to finally destroy Hizballah as an organisation, carrying out large scale attacks. Between October 2023 and November 2024, Israeli attacks in Lebanon killed around 4,000 people, injured around 16,000, and displaced around 180,000.

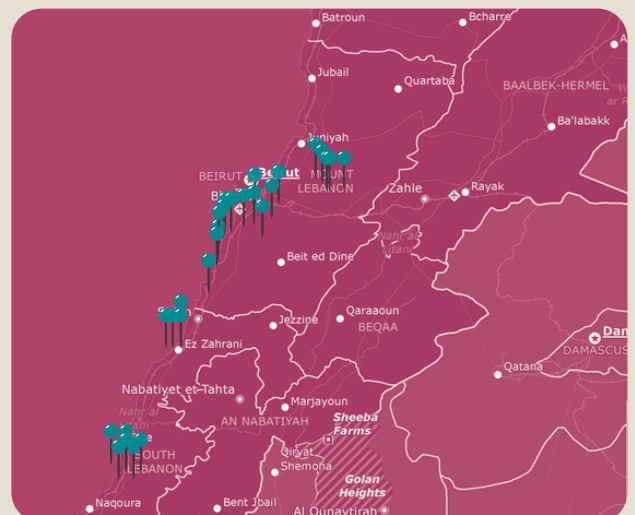
The war significantly degraded Hizballah as a fighting force, ultimately compelling a ceasefire in November 2024.

The ceasefire lasted until March 2026, during which time 15,000 violations were recorded as having been committed by Israel. With Hizballah weakened, Israel established five "military positions" and two "buffer zones" inside Lebanon during this period, effectively reinstating renewed Israeli occupation in

parts of the country. Recently, there have also been calls from within Israel for the pursuit of settlement inside parts of south Lebanon.

Such plans, however, face ongoing resistance. In March 2026, following the US-Israeli war on Iran that began in late February, and amid reports that Israel was planning to restart the war and conclusively finish the campaign against Hizballah, the group surprised observers by reopening its front against Israel.

In early April 2026, a US/Israel - Iran ceasefire was announced, though its scope remained contested. Iran and mediators indicated that Lebanon was included, but Israel continued its operations against Hizballah. Just hours after the ceasefire announcement, Israel launched one of the deadliest airstrikes Lebanon has seen in years. Within 10 minutes over 100 strikes hit the country targeting densely populated areas, killing more than 250 people and injuring thousands.*



*Figures as of 9 April 2026

ZIONISM'S EXPANSIONISM

The current escalation in Lebanon cannot be understood without recognising the colonial ideology of expansion that underpins the Zionist project. Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza, alongside its attacks against Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Qatar and Iran, is part of Zionism's expansionist agenda. Drawn partly from the 20th century vision of a "Greater Israel" and rooted in the pursuit of territorial gains that have been deemed unfulfilled.

In the case of Lebanon, Zionist activists are expressing their colonial and settler ambitions openly. Zionist groups have been holding conferences calling for the occupation, annexation, and settlement of southern Lebanon. The Uri Tzafon movement, for example, has been explicitly advocating for Jewish settlement there, and in December 2024, its members claimed to have established an 'outpost' at the border under the banner "Lebanon Is Ours". The group has also published a children's book titled "Alon and Lebanon" that encourages and advocates for settlement in southern Lebanon. This has also been coupled by statements from senior Israeli officials, most notably by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who has recently called for the annexation of southern Lebanon up to the Litani River. Defence Minister Israel Katz has likewise said that the residents of southern Lebanon cannot return and that Israel's military should occupy the south of Lebanon up to the Litani. These ambitions have long been circulating in statements such as "From the Euphrates to the sea" and in maps depicting a

"Greater Israel" extending into neighboring Arab states, including parts of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.



History teaches us that colonialism begins, first and foremost, with a metaphoric occupation, with the redrawing of borders by coloured pens and ruthless hands, with envisioning and imagining settlement, and with these visions being fed, through literature and fiction, to both children and adults alike. Palestine itself, particularly in the early Zionist imagination, from Herzl onwards and throughout the literature of Zionism was first occupied in this way, before the Haganah militias and Israeli forces moved to violently displace and massacre Palestinians.

Now that Israel's tanks are moving and images of an occupation of southern Lebanon are already circulating, we know too well its expansionist efforts will not stop there. The turn may come next to those silently watching as borders are redrawn. Unless the pen extending the idea of a "Greater Israel" is taken away, its ink won't run dry, nor will the fantasy it continues to draw.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To explore this topic further, we encourage you to check out our other resources.



[NAKBA \(1948 WAR\)](#)

Explore how the Nakba led to the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948 through expulsions and village destruction. Learn about its origins, its ongoing impact today including within Lebanon.



[ETHNIC CLEANSING: AN ONGOING NAKBA](#)

This interactive explainer traces the Nakba as an ongoing process of ethnic cleansing, from the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1947–49 to Israel's ongoing Nakba.



[CONFRONTING STATE VIOLENCE & RACISM IN LEBANON](#)

Explore how the Nakba led to the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948 through expulsions and village destruction. Learn about its origins, its ongoing impact today including within Lebanon.



[THE RIGHT OF RETURN AND THE FUTURE OF PALESTINIAN LIBERATION](#)

This interactive explainer explores the right of return as central to Palestinian liberation, showing how the ongoing Nakba continues through displacement and the denial of return, including for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.