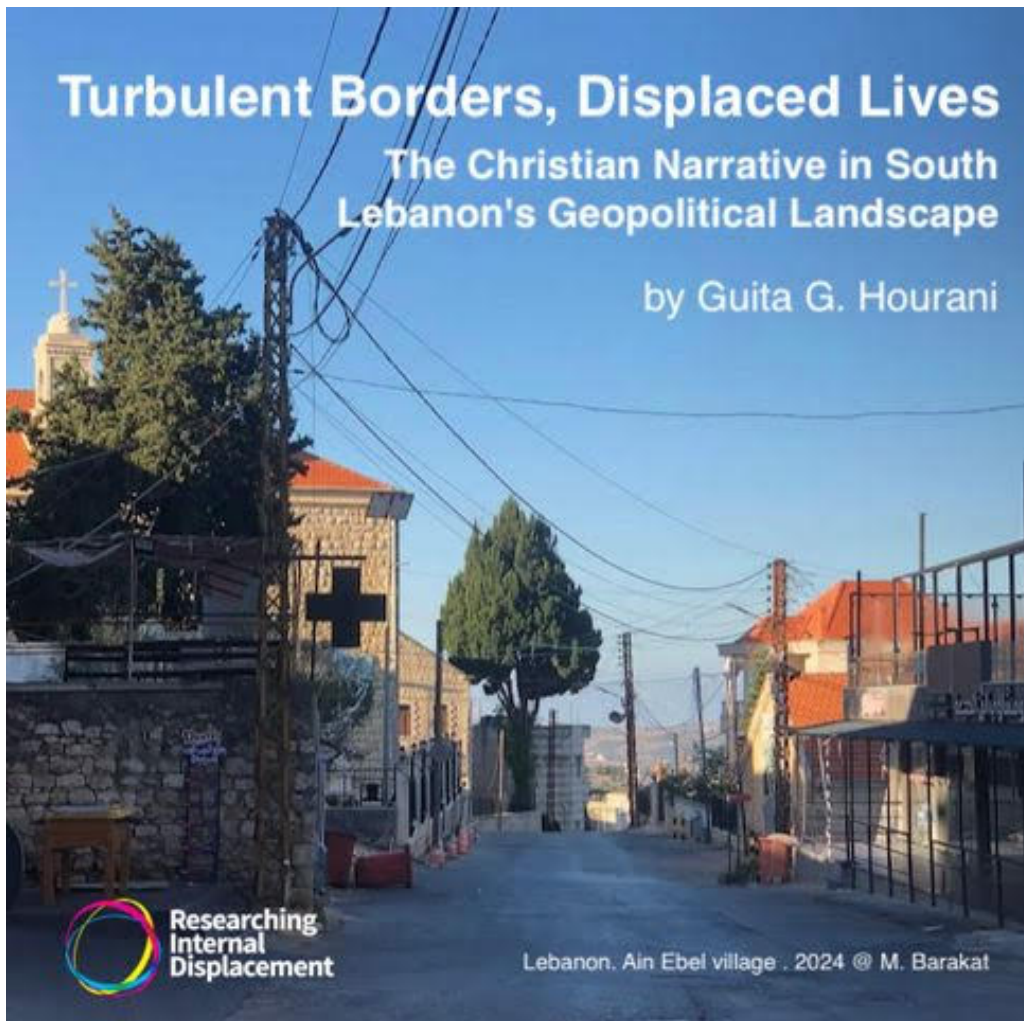


# Turbulent Borders, Displaced Lives: The Christian Narrative in South Lebanon's Geopolitical Landscape

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## Abstract

*This article<sup>1</sup> contextualizes the internal displacement of more than [94,000 individuals](#) from South Lebanon amid the ongoing conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, following Hamas's "Al-Aqsa Deluge" operation in October 2023. It investigates the causes of displacement, particularly within the Christian community, by analyzing various push factors deriving from the activities of the Israeli military, Hezbollah and the Lebanese government. Drawing on these factors, the article ascertains a seven-fold survival narrative among South Lebanon's Christians: unwavering faith, coping resilience, distancing from Christian partisan rhetoric, avoiding confrontation, rejecting the war, advocating for coexistence as a fundamental social covenant and reaffirming allegiance to Lebanon and its Armed Forces. The article concludes by emphasizing the need to cease the conflict; hold the perpetrators accountable and ensure reparation for the civilians affected by the war; ensure the right to assisted return; guarantee the rights of individuals not to be displaced; and replace Hezbollah's power formula – the Army, the People, and the Resistance equation.*

## Editor's Note

The research in this article predates the 2024 September entry of Israeli forces into Lebanon, but remains relevant as the violence between Hezbollah, the Israeli military and Lebanese forces escalates. The border communities discussed in this paper face even greater challenges and the article's themes of survival and resolution are even more critical today.

## Keywords

Lebanon, Hezbollah, Israel, internal displacement, IDPs, Christian communities, border communities

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## 1. Introduction

As of October 14, 2023, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) began monitoring the exodus of people from South Lebanon triggered by the conflict between Hezbollah, an armed non-state actor (ANSA), and Israel. By mid-May 2024, the IOM reported a significant internal displacement crisis, with approximately [94,000 individuals](#) displaced within Lebanon. This figure, higher than previous reports by IOM, underscores the severity of the situation, highlighting the growing humanitarian privations, urging the cessation of hostilities, and imploring the assisted return of the displaced populace.

The geopolitical landscape of this Lebanese province has been profoundly shaped by historical events beginning with the [Sykes-Picot Agreement](#) in 1916, which drew the first frontiers of the post-First World War Middle Eastern nation states, and continuing through to the [forced displacement of the Palestinians](#) and the establishment of the [State of Israel](#) in 1948. The latter marked a pivotal moment, introducing a complex and enduring dynamic that has significantly influenced the region's political, social, and economic fabric.

The [borders between Israel and South Lebanon](#) have served not only as physical demarcations but also as symbolic frontiers reflecting the complex interplay of regional powers, conflicting interests, and ethno-sectarian dynamics. The establishment of Israel and the [forced displacement of thousands of Palestinians](#) set in motion a series of geopolitical events that have left a lasting impact on South Lebanon's borders, leading to enduring challenges such as [protracted conflicts](#), [territorial disputes](#), [demographic shifts](#), and the persistent presence of [armed non-state actors](#) like [Hezbollah](#) (an Iranian proxy headquartered in Lebanon).

The renewed significance of the South Lebanon front in geopolitical dynamics was reignited by [Hezbollah](#) following Hamas' [Al-Aqsa Deluge Operation](#) on October 7, 2023. Hezbollah entered the conflict on October 8, 2023, stating its actions were in "[solidarity](#)" with the [Palestinian people](#). Heightened violence along the Lebanon-Israel border ensued, primarily between Hezbollah and Israel. These clashes were triggered by Israel's retaliation against Hamas for launching the Al-Aqsa Deluge Operation. Hamas' primary objective in this operation is to end the 15-year blockade of Gaza and to challenge the existing status quo in the Palestinian cause.

The clashes on the southern border of Lebanon appear to unfold within a framework of controlled [rules of engagement](#)—an unwritten understanding in force since 2006—indicating a level of strategic restraint exercised by both parties. The term "controlled rules of engagement" implies that, despite the confrontations, there is a certain degree of intentional moderation or strategic limitation in the use of force by both Hezbollah and Israel. This nuanced approach suggests a deliberate effort to avoid an uncontrolled escalation of hostilities while maintaining a level of engagement within defined parameters. However, this rule of engagement is currently being challenged in the aftermath of the Deluge operation. The robustness of this rule of engagement is dynamically influenced by the ebb and flow of the conflict in Gaza. As Israel escalates its invasion and bombardments, [Hezbollah similarly adjusts and intensifies its stance](#).

In retaliation to the Deluge Operation, Israel's military apparatus reacted under [Operation Iron Swords](#), characterized by an unprecedented approach and a notable disregard for [civilian casualties](#). As the Israeli

Defense Forces (IDF) advance against Gaza (and now [Rafah](#)), Hezbollah intensifies its military operations. The prolonged conflict, with the [geographical expansion](#) of hostilities, the [introduction of new weapons](#) by Hezbollah and the intensification and diversification of [Israel's attacks and use of force](#), poses a substantial threat to the established deterrence understanding between the two parties. The ramifications of the Gaza conflict, extending beyond its immediate theater, have triggered heightened confrontations in southern Lebanon. This [regional spillover](#) has contributed to the internal displacement phenomenon within South Lebanon, as pervasive violence and regional instability imperil the local populace.

Drawing upon the memories of [the 2006 war](#) between Hezbollah and Israel which forced the displacement of an estimated [1 million people](#), the damage to Lebanon's infrastructure by at least [3.5 billion US dollars](#), and the [evacuation of hundreds of thousands](#) of foreigners and Lebanese dual citizens, numerous Lebanese residing along the borders initially began relocating. However, as cross-border clashes intensified, a larger exodus ensued, with many residents moving outside the affected area, particularly as schools near the borders were [shuttered](#). It is crucial to recognize that this departure is not limited to various sectarian Lebanese groups; foreign workers and refugees are also relocating away from border regions. Despite the protracted and [ongoing displacement](#) affecting all residents of South Lebanon, this article focuses exclusively on the [conflict-induced displacement of the Christian population](#) residing in South Lebanon, particularly in border villages.

In the upcoming section, we will explore the reality of Christian border villages amid ongoing conflict, shedding light on the intricate dynamics and challenges faced by these communities. We will delve into the heightened targeting of select villages by the IDF, driven by the presence of Hezbollah operatives and perceived security threats. We will examine the experiences of residents, the psychological toll of living amidst conflict, and the socio-economic impacts of displacement. Additionally, we will briefly investigate the response of humanitarian organizations and the Lebanese government to address the needs of affected communities. Through this examination, we aim to elucidate the complexities of living in these border villages and the urgent need for support and solidarity in these challenging times.

## **2. Political Bias and Displacement in South Lebanon's War Zone**

The Lebanese villages lining the borders and extending five kilometers inward, each possessing strategic significance and entwined with historical tensions and geopolitical intricacies concerning Israel. Amidst them, [select villages](#) endure heightened targeting by the IDF. This elevated focus stems from two core factors a) the pronounced presence of Hezbollah operatives, infrastructure, or support networks within these locales, rendering them pivotal nodes for Hezbollah activities along the border; and b) the identification of these villages as centers of militant activities or launchpads for assaults on Israeli targets, prompting [retaliatory measures](#) from the IDF to counter perceived security threats. Consequently, these villages, distinguished by their association with Hezbollah's militant agenda and their role in incursions against Israel, face escalated surveillance and military attacks emphasizing their unique susceptibility to IDF violent actions. Pierre Atallah, a journalist and Deputy Mayor in Rachaya Al Foukhar, said in our interview with him on March 21, 2024, that Hezbollah generally adheres to a policy of refraining from launching attacks from Christian areas or near residential houses to avoid antagonizing these communities. A similar approach is applied in Druze villages. Nadim Al-Bustani, a lawyer and researcher specializing in human rights and federalism, articulated that the Druze community expresses its discontent with the ongoing war and declares its rejection parallel to that of the Christians. However, the spiritual and political leaders of the Druze have adhered to the general slogans set by Hezbollah or adopted by Hamas to justify



the confrontation with Israel. Villages in the Western Bekaa, Hasbaya, Rashaya, Wazzani, and Biyadah, still experience relative calm, with minimal displacement. So far, Hezbollah has not deliberately initiated any attacks from these areas. This makes their situation, as of yet, more reassuring in terms of the risk of displacement or the extension of the war's bloody and destructive effects to their villages.

Ironically, because most of the Christian villages have not been directly targeted by the IDF, the population in these areas, whether displaced or remaining, are [not officially classified as displaced](#) and thus are not eligible for any type of aid. Although many of these villages (e.g., Yaroun, Aalma El Chaeb, Deir Mimas, Borj El Mlouk, Kolea, and Jdeidet Marjayoun, among others) [were targeted](#). This outright discrimination is not merely a casual misclassification; it epitomizes political bias, particularly because Christians, along with other Muslims including Shiites, oppose the senseless skirmishes in the South, which will not benefit Palestine but certainly will further devastate what remains of Lebanon. This discrimination represents a direct reaction to the stance taken by Christian leaders in Lebanon, whether religious or partisan, who vehemently oppose this war and Hezbollah's disregard for Lebanon's sovereignty.

A political analyst interviewed on April 24, 2024, who chose to remain anonymous, revealed that Christians in South Lebanon have entered the war [against their will](#). They remain involuntarily silent to avoid conflicts with their Hezbollah-supporting neighbors. While many Christian-majority villages have avoided direct attacks because they don't harbor Hezbollah fighters or military actions in their areas, it does not mean that they are not affected, or at peace, or not threatened by Israel, in fact the underlying turmoil and anxiety persist. He stressed the importance for these communities to vigilantly manage their interactions with Hezbollah and its supporters to avoid potential retaliatory actions that could harm their villages. He cited the [March 26, 2024](#) incident in Rmeish, where residents clashed with a Hezbollah group attempting to install a rocket launcher within town limits. These communities endure the ceaseless echoes of war, the devastation of their livelihoods, the erosion of their mental well-being, separation from their families, worries over their children's disrupted education, uncertainty about their future, and heightened anxiety over the looming specter of full-scale conflict. Despite not being directly engaged in confrontations, the psychological toll on them is profound. These Christians, alongside other southern Lebanese communities like the Druze and Sunnis who share similar plights, represent the unseen casualties of war. Karim Hamdan, a political and social activist, and a member of the Civil Society Dialogue Table, who ran for parliamentary elections in the Third Southern District in 2022, expressed in our interview on March 31, 2024, that events unfolded similarly in the Druze town of Shwayya and predominantly Sunni towns like Arqoub, akin to what happened in Rmeish. The villagers stood against involving their towns and people in a war they have no stake in. Ali Al-Amine, a journalist and editor of news site Janoubia.com, declared in his interview with us on April 6, 2024, that “to some extent, Hezbollah takes into account non-Shiite components, but strictly within the limits of maintaining its own decisions and orientations, which it determines independently of any of these components, including the Shiite component itself. Generally, Hezbollah has not shown any intent to provoke conflicts with Christians or other groups, but it will not allow them or anyone else to influence its decisions regarding war or peace.”

Rabih (pseudonym), a resident actively engaged in community efforts in the District of Bint Jbeil, who was interviewed on December 19, 2023 articulated that all the border villages have been affected by the conflict and that the [majority of the residents have left](#). He specified that the villages of Ain Ebel, Rmeish, Debel, Al-Qaouzah, Alma Al Chaab, and Yaroun serve as poignant examples of Christian communities grappling with displacement. Villages with Christian populations such as Ebel, Ain Ebel, Aita Shaab, Aitroun, Al-Qlayaa, Al-Qaouzah, Burj al-Moulouk, Deir Mimas, Jdeideh Marjayoun, Kawkaba, Maroun

al-Ras, Ramiyah, and Rashaya al-Fukhar have witnessed various types of [military attacks](#) and [population movements](#).

Rabih succinctly quantified the extent of displacement, revealing that 500 individuals, encompassing women, children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, departed from Ain Ebel. Concurrently, Rmeish witnessed the departure of 3,000 individuals with comparable demographic characteristics. Debel experienced the displacement of 500 residents, while Alma Al Chaab saw 620 residents relocated. In the face of adversity, Yaroun and [Al-Qaouzah](#) witnessed a complete exodus of their Christian inhabitants, totaling 100 and 130 residents, respectively. Al-Qaouzah, in particular, faced a devastating blow on April 27, 2024 when an Israeli air raid destroyed its cherished [heritage borough](#). These statistics, while not comprehensive for all Christian-populated border villages, highlight the significant demographic changes and challenges confronted by these small yet culturally significant communities in the province.

Atef (pseudonym), who serves as the president of an NGO in a Christian village in South Lebanon and who was interviewed on December 5, 2023 emphasized that the [majority of Christians](#) who have left their villages on the Border Strip due to impending danger have sought refuge in predominantly Christian areas, such as West Beirut, Baabda, Maten, Kesserwan, and Batroun, all of which notably are situated at a considerable distance from the borders. Moving into an area with compatible ethno-religious identity [allows for more solidarity](#), cohesiveness, and protection. He further emphasized that this self-settled pattern is characterized by diverse accommodations, including individuals staying mostly with family members, some utilizing secondary residences, and others leasing apartments.

[Saïd](#) (pseudonym), a community activist in Debel who was interviewed on December 12, 2023 reports that Christian villages have been [spared direct attacks](#) due to the absence of Hezbollah fighters and military actions within them. However, the residents still suffer from the pervasive fear and disruptions caused by the ongoing conflict. The relentless noise pollution from Israeli jet fighters and Hezbollah rocket launches, coupled with the constant sound of bombardments, has led to sleepless nights and heightened anxiety among the villagers. Saïd conveyed lamentation regarding the exorbitant [rental rates](#) prevalent in numerous regions across Lebanon, where displaced individuals seek refuge, exploiting the vulnerable circumstances of this population.

Rabih, Atef, and Saïd articulated that on a communal level, collaborative initiatives between villages and municipalities have culminated in the establishment of localized [crisis cells](#). These entities have engaged with a spectrum of stakeholders, encompassing donor institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon ([UNIFIL](#)), to address the multifaceted needs of both displaced individuals and those who opted to remain. The socioeconomic predicament of the [residents who stayed behind](#) is exacerbated by the substantial expenses incurred due to the displacement of their families. The loss of assets and economic activities has left them unable to meet the essential needs of both themselves and their displaced relatives. This financial strain is particularly severe among farmers, technicians, and individuals in the informal sector who have experienced a complete cessation of their livelihoods.

In addressing the urgent requirement for medical supplies, several organizations were approached, with [Caritas](#) being the first to respond, according to Rabih. Dr. Joseph Jarjour, a professor of history at Rmeich Public High School, stated in an interview on April 6, 2024, that Caritas has been the arm of the church in its aid to the population. Meanwhile, the Maronite League and [Solidarity](#) have provided food parcels

and school tuition, and the Knights of Malta have supplied medicine and medical services to Rmeich and its surrounding villages. Rabih noted that NGOs providing medication have faced consistent shortages of specific, high-cost pharmaceuticals.

The Order of Malta accommodates medication requests, yet contends with a consistent shortage of specific and high-cost pharmaceuticals especially of those related to chronic diseases, added Rabih. Fortunately, entities such as Red Dot, [Deir Mimas Baptist Church](#), [Medecins Sans Frontières](#), [USAID](#), [Union of Relief and Development Associations](#), among many [others](#) and contributions from the Lebanese diaspora, have provided assistance for basic needs.

The conflict erupted at a time when Lebanon is facing a prolonged economic, financial, and political crisis since 2019. The national currency has lost over 98% of its value, plunging the Lebanese population into widespread and multidimensional [poverty](#). No one was held accountable for the schemes that left the Lebanese destitute. They lost their bank deposits, savings, life insurance, retirement plans, and pensions, all robbed by [corrupt politicians](#) and their cronies, leaving them to their fate. The World Bank has reported that Lebanon's economic and financial collapse is among the [most severe globally since the mid-19th century](#). Inflation has been on the rise, [reaching 270%](#) as of April 2024. Similarly, the Consumer Price Index has increased, [annualizing at 70.4%](#) during the same period.

The interviewees additionally conveyed that with regard to essential services, the villages contend with an electricity deficit. Residents are facing challenges in meeting utility payments. Despite the continued operation of generators to secure some stable energy supply for those who remained, a critical question arises regarding the sustainability of this effort at a financial loss.

An additional concern affecting the resilience of those who have stayed pertains to the availability of fuel for heating, especially during the current winter season, as mentioned by the interviewees. The cost of fuel is particularly burdensome, exacerbating the financial constraints of the community. Furthermore, the existing challenges within the telecommunications infrastructure and internet connectivity, which are already problematic in normal circumstances, are further exacerbated during these turbulent times. Additionally, the interviewees pointed out the frequent disruptions in the electricity grid and the recurrent breakdown of communication channels, hindering effective communication and impeding remote educational pursuits. This situation intensifies the isolation of individuals and communities.

Rabih, Atef, Saïd, and Dr. Jarjour agreed that, although appreciative of the humanitarian aid, the displaced express a preference for returning to their villages to tend to their homes, land, businesses, and family lives, striving for a return to normalcy.

While the displaced are struggling for aid, members and supporters of Hezbollah and Amal Movement (the Shiite Duo as known in Lebanon) are receiving care and assistance. According to [L'Orient le Jour](#), the *WaTaa'wanu* Association, along with Hezbollah's Social Work Unit, has been actively supporting displaced families by providing a monthly rent subsidy, covering the cost of a 5-amp generator subscription, and offering a monthly food package. Hezbollah's Islamic Health Association has been distributing financial aid and continuing to provide health services. Both groups prioritize supporting the families of their fighters, their supporters, and the wider Shiite population with no consideration to non-Shiites who are suffering the consequences of Hezbollah's war. This lack of consideration has led to

animosity between the diverse communities of South Lebanon and has even “resulted in accusations that Hezbollah and the Amal Movement are [‘sectarianizing’ the conflict.](#)”

It was reported that Hezbollah distributed \$100 to families in one of the schools turned into a shelter in Tyre, a [gesture received with disdain](#). The displaced feel that this war was imposed on them, as [Hezbollah made a unilateral decision](#) to drag South Lebanon into this quagmire without any [contingency plan](#) or [preparation](#) for shelters, food provisions, survival supplies, and ensure the resilience of civilians, particularly those from the south, amid the economic collapse and the decline in citizens' purchasing power. They believe that [those who wish to wage war](#) must be prepared to care for the people who will bear the brunt of it. Riad Issa, a socio-political analyst from Hebbariyeh, said in our interview on May 4, 2024, that Israel is prepared for such eventualities. There is no comparison in terms of preparing civilians for war between Lebanon and Israel; consequently, the war is inherently unequal. Dr. Mona Fayad, a retired Lebanese university professor stated during our interview on March 26, 2024 that “Hezbollah ignores the suffering it inflicts, portraying itself as victorious and righteous. It ignores the devastation it brings upon its own supporters and other citizens in the South, as well as its broader impact on Lebanon. Hezbollah expects the people of Lebanon, particularly those in the south, to endure unjust deaths, home demolitions, and loss of livelihoods while unwaveringly supporting Hezbollah's continuity and its deadly arsenal.

One might expect the Lebanese government to swiftly come to the aid of its displaced citizens. However, this is far from reality. Initially, the [government pledged](#) to provide \$140 monthly to each displaced family of six individuals listed as among the most vulnerable national families. However, these payments were later stretched to every two months and eventually reduced to \$100. Despite some initial aid provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Disaster Management Room in Tyre and the distribution of around 5,000 food parcels, blankets, mattresses, milk, and diapers by the Council of the South at the onset of displacement, there is currently no official body offering assistance. [Lebanon requires \\$73 million](#) to meet the basic needs of the displaced, but the nation is grappling with a profound financial crisis. [Media reports](#) indicate widespread [disappointment and grievances](#) among the displaced community regarding the lack of assistance and care from the Lebanese government. According to Eduardo Wassim Aboultaif, Professor of Politics, there is currently no legal framework in place to protect the internally displaced. The issue hinges on the government's commitment and diligence in safeguarding the rights of displaced individuals. The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice are tasked with protecting their legal rights to their properties, while the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for ensuring financial support for the displaced, preventing them from being compelled to sell their properties merely to sustain themselves.

The Council of the South, closely affiliated with Nabih Berri, the head of the Amal Movement and the Lebanese parliament, whose party is involved in the conflict in South Lebanon, operates as a political tool that [operates as a controversial political tool](#). While Hezbollah receives funding from Iran and engages in other illicit activities, Amal accesses funds from the Lebanese treasury. As recently as May 28, 2024, the Council requested the Cabinet secure a budget of 93 billion and 600 million Lebanese pounds (equivalent to approximately 1.04 million dollars) to provide aid to the families of martyrs and displaced individuals from their villages and homes due to the Israeli attacks after October 7, 2023. The [Cabinet approved the demand](#). The request generated criticism and disdain because the funds would come from the people's taxes, and the public did not support the war. Additionally, the government had not approved of this conflict. The government, already constrained by budgetary limitations, is struggling to fund its institutions, yet it has now approved this fund to the Council.



In response to the Cabinet's regrettable decision, Parliamentarian Mark Daou [expressed dissatisfaction on Instagram](#). He noted the approval of aid, requested by the Council of the South, for some of the heirs of martyrs (totaling 52) affected by Israeli attacks on South Lebanon. Daou emphasized that state compensation essentially constitutes public funds. He criticized political parties for dishonesty, stating that public funds, along with support from the United Nations and donor countries, sustain the southern province. Similarly, Samir Geagea, Head of the Lebanese Forces political party, [clarified that refusing](#) the government's decision is not aimed at the suffering people or those whose homes have been destroyed. Instead, it is directed against those who hijack the decisions of the people and the state, making critical decisions that burden the Lebanese people with the consequences of their wars, adventures, and decisions. He emphasized that leniency in this matter encourages this group to engage in further wars that have destroyed Lebanon and continue to do so.

In the next section, we will delve deeper into the push factors that contribute to these displacements. We will examine the impact of Israel's aggressive military tactics, the shared responsibility of both Israel and Hezbollah in perpetuating violence, Hezbollah's behavior towards those who oppose its vision for Lebanon and its decision to enter into war with Israel. Furthermore, we will address the Lebanese state's abdication of its responsibility to protect its citizens, leading to an environment where marginalized communities suffer the most. Through this exploration, we aim to understand how these combined factors exacerbate displacement and intensify the struggles of affected populations.

### **3. Displacement Push Factors**

#### *3.1 Push Factors Caused by Israel*

##### *Israel's Use of White Phosphorus Munitions*

Between October 2023 and May 2024, Israel's actions in the use of [white phosphorus munitions](#) in southern Lebanon have had severe implications, contributing to civilian harm and displacement in the region. [Human Rights Watch](#) verified the use of white phosphorus munitions by Israeli forces in at least 17 municipalities across south Lebanon since October 2023, including instances where airburst munitions were unlawfully used over populated residential areas. The impact of white phosphorus on civilians has been significant, with cases reported of [individuals suffering asphyxiation](#) from inhaling white phosphorus smoke, severe respiratory symptoms, and hospital admissions due to the exposure. This use of white phosphorus violates international humanitarian law, particularly in its indiscriminate targeting of populated areas, leading to grave risks for civilians and [causing horrific harm](#).

##### *Indiscriminate Attacks*

Since October 8, 2023, Israel, Hezbollah, and other armed groups in Lebanon have engaged in over 4,700 attacks across the border. Israel alone accounted for approximately [83% of these attacks](#). The [assaults ranged](#) from artillery or missile strikes to air or drone strikes, armed clashes, property destruction, and the use of explosives. Tragically, Israeli indiscriminate attacks have led to the [deaths of at least 73 civilians](#), including children, medical personnel, and journalists. Israel has been known to [target civilian vehicles](#) suspected of transporting Hezbollah members. In a particularly shocking incident on March 27, 2024, an Israeli strike on an emergency and relief center in southern Lebanon resulted in the deaths of seven civilian

relief volunteers. Although most of the [medics killed](#) were affiliated with Hezbollah and Amal Movement medical organizations, targeting them constitutes an unlawful assault on civilians under international law and warrants investigation for potential [war crimes](#). These attacks have not only resulted in loss of life but have also contributed to widespread displacement and restricted movement, particularly in South Lebanon.

### *“Scorched Earth” and Threat Policies*

Israel's implementation of a "[Scorched Earth policy](#)" in southern Lebanon, utilizing white phosphorus as an incendiary weapon, has resulted in enduring implications for the environmental and economic conditions of the affected area. This strategic approach has introduced the possibility of sustained environmental repercussions, contributing to internal displacement as individuals seek safety and stability in less affected regions. Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich urged for Israel to [seize control of southern Lebanon](#) on June 3, 2024, advocating for significant destruction in Beirut and the relocation of the security zone from Israeli territory in Galilee to southern Lebanon, which would involve a ground invasion. On June 7, 2023, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant threatened to send Lebanon back to "[the Stone Age](#)" in a war with Hezbollah. As recently as June 5, 2024, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said "[It is time for Lebanon to burn](#)" as forest fires raged through northern Israel due to [Hezbollah's counter-attack](#).

## *3.2 Push Factors Caused by Israel and Hezbollah*

### *Stratified Physical Fears*

The situation in South Lebanon is marked by "stratified fears," where a complex interplay of various anxieties stemming from different sources and factors contributes to multifaceted apprehensions among residents, leading to displacement. An immediate concern arises from Israel's [indiscriminate](#) retaliatory actions, resulting in death and destruction. Israel's relentless aggression knows no bounds, leaving Lebanese southerners to endure its devastating effects repeatedly. The fear of physical harm from Israel is further compounded by concerns regarding Hezbollah's counter-retaliation, weaponry and militants [deployed within or near civilian areas](#), as well as the apprehension of [retaliation against non-supportive populations](#). Additionally, there are concerns regarding other [factions](#) operating under Hezbollah's umbrella, which may independently target the local population, especially those who oppose this futile conflict. Thus, the fear is heightened as Hezbollah and these factions pose a potential threat, particularly to those opposing the concept of the "[Unity of Battlefields](#)" or "[Unity of Fronts](#)," and to the risk of dragging Lebanon into a full-fledged war with Israel.

### *Psychological Harm*

Another push factor for displacement is that the ongoing conflict poses a significant risk to the mental well-being of civilians, potentially reviving and compounding the [psychological traumas of past experiences](#), particularly the [2006 war](#). The persistent auditory presence of weapons used in retaliation and counter-retaliation, along with the constant noise of warplanes, drones, strikes, and bombardments, has induced profound psychological [distress](#) among the inhabitants of southern Lebanese border communities. Internally displaced individuals are experiencing a range of mental health challenges, including general psychological distress, psychosocial stressors, and anxiety. Many report [difficulties](#)

arising from heightened tension, conflicts, exhaustion, and concerns about the security of their homes. Children, in particular, are the most vulnerable and affected among the displaced. The disruption of normal life, schooling, and family has resulted in significant psychological impacts. [According to UNICEF](#), these children exhibit various signs of distress, such as anxiety, trauma, behavioral issues, and disrupted sleep patterns.

### *Restricted Movements*

The limitation on residents' mobility, motivated by the imperative to prevent indiscriminate attacks and misinterpretations amid cross-border conflicts, carries significant ramifications for both daily life and local economies and has also induced displacement. This climate of caution and constrained movement complicates ordinary tasks, impeding essential activities and disrupting economic pursuits in affected areas. Reports indicate that civilian casualties have occurred during Israeli strikes, [targeting individuals in transit in their vehicles](#) or [engaged in agricultural](#) or [pastoral work](#). Imran Riza, the United Nations' Humanitarian Coordinator in Lebanon, aptly articulates the distress among communities, highlighting the ongoing destruction of agricultural land and the pervasive [insecurity hindering safe movement](#) due to frequent clashes. The escalation of retaliatory actions between Israel and Hezbollah, [extending geographically beyond border regions](#), raises substantial concerns, as noted by Roberta La Fortezza, an Intelligence and Security Analyst specializing in the MENA and Sahel regions at the Università degli Studi di Siena in Italy. Furthermore, the heightened level of alert may lead to the use of lethal force against any [perceived movement](#), further complicating the situation and exacerbating exodus.

### *3.3 Push Factors Caused by Hezbollah*

#### *Growing Communal Tension*

The tension simmering between the Christian and Shiite communities in South Lebanon is palpable, akin to a smoldering ember waiting to ignite. This tension serves as a significant push factor, fueled by the enduring conflicts between Hezbollah and Israel. Numerous incidents have intensified this strain, particularly those infringing upon the property rights of Christian landowners. One notable occurrence involved Hezbollah-affiliated actors, masquerading under the guise of an environmental organization called Green Without Borders, [engaging in excavation](#), tree felling, and road construction on lands belonging to Christian families such as Al-Ameel, Al-Alam, and Al-Hajj from Rmeish. These actions sparked outrage among affected families, prompting intervention from Maronite Patriarchal authorities to pressure Hezbollah to relinquish control over the lands. Residents of Rmeish vehemently asserted their ownership rights and demanded that Hezbollah members be accompanied by Lebanese Armed Forces personnel for any activities in the area. In response, [Hezbollah representatives](#) sought to placate villagers, affirming the heirs' property rights and inviting them to return whenever they desired. However, suspicions linger that [Green Without Borders](#) operates as a front for a faction within Hezbollah, allegedly involved in intelligence gathering, outpost construction, and providing cover for Radwan Forces operatives along the border region adjacent to Israel. Karim Hamdan, a political and social activist, and a member of the Civil Society Dialogue Table, who ran for parliamentary elections in the Third Southern District in 2022, expressed in our interview on March 31, 2024, that Hezbollah deals with opponents through intimidation, threats, coercion, and marginalization. Undoubtedly, this approach leads to alienation, estrangement, and heightened communal tension. Toni Nissi, President of the Committee for the UN Resolutions for Lebanon, noted in an interview with us on April 14, 2024, that displacement has relatively decreased in

villages where Hezbollah has been prevented from using the locals' lands and residential areas as missile launch sites.

### *Covert Intimidation*

Covert intimidation emerges as another underlying factor driving displacement, particularly among those who oppose Hezbollah's agenda. Individuals find themselves unable to openly express dissenting views, especially concerning Hezbollah's recurrent and detrimental conflicts with Israel. The fear of reprisal, including threats of assassination, abduction, or other forms of covert coercion, instills a culture of self-censorship. Milad Alam, [Mayor of Rmeish](#), acknowledges the unique predicament faced by Christian communities in the South, hinting at a reluctance to challenge Hezbollah's [dominant political and ideological influence](#). This dynamic suggests a climate where individuals feel compelled to conform to the prevailing power structure to avoid repercussions, resembling a modern form of "[dhimmitude](#)." However, the Christians of South Lebanon are not easily coopted. Despite the threat of war and Hezbollah's covert intimidation, they celebrate Palm Sunday with processions carrying palms and olive branches. [This act of defiance frustrates Hezbollah](#), whose policies are often associated with death and destruction. This indirect experience of attempted subjugation complicates the socio-political landscape, fostering marginalization and potentially driving communities to seek refuge elsewhere to escape the cycle of coercion and insecurity.

### *Historical Mistrust*

Historical mistrust adds to the feeling of uneasiness. On August 2, 2023, Elias Al-Hasrouni, a Maronite Catholic and the former official responsible for overseeing the Bint Jbeil region within the Lebanese Forces party (a staunch opponent to Hezbollah's ideology and strategy), met his demise in Ain Ebel. Initially believed to be the result of a vehicular accident due to his proximity to his vehicle below the road, a subsequent investigation through private surveillance cameras in nearby residences revealed a meticulously planned ambush that led to his [abduction and subsequent assassination](#). Residents of Ain Ebel had noticed the presence of four-wheel-drive vehicles with fake license plates circling the town and its surroundings, occupied by bearded individuals wearing caps as part of their disguise. This is not the first time that Hezbollah is accused of assassinating voices of opposition. Their "[rap sheet](#)" continues to expand, including the silencing of politicians, journalists, key government employees, and high-ranking army officers. The historical mistrust is correlated with covert intimidation and with fear of suspicion of espionage.

### *Fear of Suspicion of Espionage*

In the context of cross-border conflicts in South Lebanon, mutual suspicion prevails between Israelis and Hezbollah, rooted in a protracted history of animosity that has cultivated a pervasive atmosphere of distrust. Israelis remain wary of Hezbollah's intelligence-gathering activities, suspecting the organization of deploying covert operatives along the border. This suspicion is reciprocated, with Hezbollah harboring concerns about local [Lebanese potentially engaging in espionage for Israel](#). Hezbollah employs various methods to harass and intimidate Christians. As recently as December 30, 2023, the pro-Hezbollah "Body of Representatives of Prisoners and Liberated" announced that it had filed a lawsuit against the [Maronite](#) (Catholic) Archbishop of Haifa and the Patriarchal Vicar in Jerusalem, Palestine, and Jordan, Musa al-Haj, and the Patriarchal Vicar of the Syriac Catholic Church in the Holy Land, Archbishop Kamil Simaan,

for "[communication with the Zionist enemy](#)." On July 19, 2022, Hezbollah accused Archbishop Mousa El-Hajj, who was carrying donated medicine and close to half a million dollars of aid, of "[laundering spying money](#)." The Archbishop was arrested, stripped of all his possessions, had his passport confiscated, and was banned from visiting his congregation in the Holy Land. He was interrogated for eight hours and held for 11. Later, he was [summoned before a military court](#). Hezbollah utilizes these accusations of spying for Israel as a tool of intimidation and defamation, targeting not only Christians who oppose its agenda but also individuals from other communities who resist its influence. As articulated by one [Shiite observer](#), in the eyes of Hezbollah, "Each Shiite opposing figure is charged with [treason](#), every Sunni dissident is accused of ISIS affiliation, and every Christian protester is labelled as an agent of Israel." Such [accusations](#) carry significant legal consequences in Lebanon, warranting severe penalties in accordance with the provisions of the General and Military Penal Code, as well as the law of boycotting Israel. [Historical instances](#) further underscore this [dynamic](#), adding complexity and tension to the ongoing cross-border hostilities and the lives of citizens in the region.

### *3.4 Push Factors Caused by the Lebanese State*

#### *Abandonment*

Abandonment persists as a salient theme in the villages and towns of the Lebanese Border Strip, driving citizens to depart. In her response to our questions, a school teacher known as Nour (pseudonym) stated on April 6, 2024, that they have not witnessed any government plans, leaving the fate of the people of the south solely in their hands. Local communities experience a profound sense of abandonment by the central government, exacerbated by the perceived inability of the Lebanese army to intervene and prevent Hezbollah from unilaterally involving Lebanon in the cycle of destruction once again. Additionally, there's a perceived [inability of the army to safeguard](#) individuals or communities from Hezbollah's reprisals against dissenting voices within Lebanon. The Lebanese state appears powerless in the face of Hezbollah's dominance across various spheres. Khalil Helou, retired general from the Lebanese Armed Forces and a university professor, stated in his interview with us on December 19, 2023, "the southern Lebanese and particularly the Christians, do not feel that there is a state protecting them from either Hezbollah or Israel, so they are exposed to both sides. Nothing prevents Hezbollah from arresting or targeting them, nor does anything protect them from Israeli retaliation. The Lebanese army in the south does not implement [Resolution 1701](#) which intended to resolve the 2006 Lebanon War, and the Lebanese authorities, which are under Hezbollah's influence, are unlikely to take any action." Vincent Gelot, project manager for the NGO L'Œuvre d'Orient in Syria and Lebanon, [noted](#) that "during the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon, Christians did not abandon the south of the country to the extent they are today." Gelot further believes that "the current situation is extremely dire for two main reasons: there is significantly more uncertainty about where the bombings will occur, and the collapse of the state has made survival much more difficult." This power imbalance is creating a dangerous gap between the state and its citizens, to the advantage of Hezbollah's vision of [transforming Lebanon into a theocratic state](#) akin to Iran.

In the preceding section, we explored the push factors behind displacement, shedding light on the intricate dynamics fueling this phenomenon and its compounded hardships. In the following section, we will examine the survival narratives employed by the Christian community in the South to navigate through this period of contention and uphold social peace. This approach entails a systematic effort to manage conflicts and foster cohesion with dominant forces and their supportive environment.



## 4. Christians of the South’s Seven-Fold Survival Narratives

In South Lebanon, amidst political tensions, the Christian community adopts a pragmatic approach to survival. A seven-fold survival narrative framework has been developed to illustrate the community's strategy for overcoming this challenging period. Despite tensions and disagreements, this approach signifies a deliberate strategy aimed at navigating complex political landscapes while prioritizing survival in an environment fraught with political and military tensions.

### 4.1 *Unwavering Faith*

Faith serves as a pillar of strength and guidance for the Christian community amidst the ongoing conflict in South Lebanon. The theological perspectives on suffering, martyrdom, and divine protection underpin their steadfastness, supported by the unwavering presence of [religious leaders](#). These clergy members not only [remain in the region to minister](#) to those in need but also continue to [celebrate mass](#) and perform other rites, demonstrating their deep commitment to their communities. The return of displaced individuals during significant holidays to partake in traditional celebrations further underscores their dedication and connection to their community. The strong religious conviction of Christians and Easter in South Lebanon provides them with hope, strength, and perseverance during times of adversity, drawing inspiration from their [ancestors](#) who endured wars without abandoning their land. Additionally, the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the Christian community serve as sources of identity, pride, and resilience in the face of external threats. This combination of faith and cultural heritage sustains the community through ongoing challenges, reinforcing their determination to maintain hope and peace amidst uncertainty.

### 4.2 *Coping Resilience*

In the context of prolonged conflict and displacement in South Lebanon, resilience emerges as a defining theme. Lebanese people are often depicted as resilient which “[comes in the context of](#) continuous adaptation to unfavorable circumstances and the Lebanese people’s capacity to find individualized ways around difficulties.” Despite decades of turmoil and recent economic collapse, the region's inhabitants, including the Christians, demonstrate remarkable adaptability and determination. Their proactive responses, such as partial village and family evacuations, solidarity among those who remain, and support from the Lebanese diaspora underscore their ability to persevere in precarious circumstances. [Steadfasting](#) in their land and protecting their presence in the South is a paramount objective of those who stayed. Their rhetoric emits courage and unwavering hope and perseverance. Community Support: The close-knit nature of the Christian community in South Lebanon fosters solidarity, mutual assistance, and social support, which are essential elements of resilience in challenging circumstances. Nissi and other experts interviewed for this article have affirmed that despite the relocation of some women, children, and the elderly, Christians remain resilient in their villages.

### 4.3 *Distancing from Christian Partisan Rhetoric*

The Christians of South Lebanon maintain a neutral stance or refrain from publicly expressing their views amid the country's political and ideological divisions. Since the conflict began on October 8, 2023, they have particularly [distanced themselves](#) from the rhetoric of Christian partisan groups critical of

Hezbollah's actions, opting instead for pragmatic considerations and stability. The unique context of Christian villages in the south, notably with the presence of Hezbollah, necessitates this pragmatic approach, which unfortunately restricts freedom of expression. Hezbollah uses the Christians in South Lebanon to send [messages](#) to Christian leaders, both temporal and spiritual. The Christians are like hostages with some privileges that can be revoked at any time. Hezbollah has repeatedly made it clear that all southern lands, including Christian villages, are open to resistance operations against Israel.

#### *4.4 Avoiding Confrontation*

Indeed, navigating the challenges posed by groups launching attacks from the town or its surroundings demands a nuanced approach. Directly confronting armed individuals equipped with missiles is not feasible, thus diplomacy and negotiation become the preferred strategies. However, this path is riddled with obstacles, primarily due to the difficulty in managing certain young locals who reject Hezbollah's dominance and encroachment on their pride. Moreover, the pervasive psychological pressure exacerbates the complexity of direct confrontation. Therefore, the strategy pivots towards avoiding confrontation through [appeasement and polite appeals](#), seeking to peacefully persuade these groups to refrain from operating within residential areas. This pragmatic approach underscores a commitment to prioritizing peace and safety above all else. It's important to underscore that the Christians and other communities, whether in the South or elsewhere, are not seeking conflict with Hezbollah and remain unarmed. Consequently, direct confrontation is typically only conceivable if initiated by Hezbollah or instigated by a third party benefiting from such discord.

#### *4.5 Confirming the Enmity of Israel but Rejecting the War*

Considering the repercussions of past conflicts and their aftermath, coupled with their perception of being unwillingly dragged into conflicts fueled by Hezbollah's actions contrary to Lebanon's interests, the Christians of South Lebanon acknowledge Israel as a national enemy and feel solidarity with the Palestinians. However, they staunchly [oppose engaging in any violent confrontation](#) recognizing the [catastrophic impact](#) it would have on Lebanon and its people. Christians in the south are unanimously expressing their weariness of this unjustified war that has no horizon. The general Lebanese sentiments are characterized by a delicate balance between solidarity with the Palestinians and apprehension about being embroiled in a destructive conflict. This dichotomy is evident in the social settings of all the communities of Lebanon, Druze, Christians, Sunnis and Shiites. The latter's environment have expressed [resentment towards Hezbollah's continued war](#). Dr. Allouche, a surgeon, professor, former deputy for the city of Tripoli, and a political activist, asserted in our interview on April 11, 2024, that "Hezbollah brands dissenters as enemies, traitors, or cowards. This sweeping approach has indiscriminately targeted Shiites, exemplified by the assassination of political commentator, columnist, and activist [Lokman Slim](#), the expulsion and treason accusations against [Shiite cleric Ali Al-Amin](#), and the social isolation of Shiite activists accused of collaborating with embassies."

#### *4.6 Advocating for Coexistence*

Issa, Hamdan, and other interviewees assert that Hezbollah's negative response to individuals holding opposing views, without addressing their concerns or engaging in dialogue, exacerbates tensions, especially during times of war. This approach has a detrimental effect on future relations between neighboring towns, fostering preconceptions, accusations, and counter-accusations, which undermine

cohesion, solidarity, and coexistence among the Lebanese populace. Notwithstanding the current conflict, the Christians of South Lebanon actively promote peaceful coexistence with other religious and ethnic groups in the region. This includes initiatives such as [interfaith dialogue](#) and educational programs aimed at fostering tolerance and understanding. The Christians recognize the necessity of coexistence and pragmatic neighborly relations to not only exist but also to survive and flourish. They are committed to the sustained [promotion of coexistence](#) as a fundamental social covenant. Dr. Fayad shared her perspective on coexistence during our interview on March 26, 2024. She remarked, "The displacement and migration of Christians represent a significant calamity as they undermine the essence of coexistence in Lebanon. This phenomenon poses a threat to Lebanon's very existence, potentially turning it into a state resembling Israel, where pluralism is suppressed and equality is disregarded."

#### *4.7 Reaffirming of Allegiance to Lebanon and its Armed Forces*

The Christian community in South Lebanon reaffirms its loyalty to Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, freedom, and the [Lebanese Armed Forces](#). They have consistently requested the Lebanese state to deploy the army for their protection, emphasizing that their choice is the state, legitimacy, and the Lebanese army. Pierre Atallah, a journalist and Deputy Mayor in Rachaya Al Foukhar, said in our interview with him on March 21, 2024, that in the South both Christian and Druze communities tend to support the Lebanese Army and hold Hezbollah responsible for initiating conflicts with Israel.

The seven-fold narrative is interconnected and reliant. While these pragmatic approaches are commendable and justified, they still carry an implicit sense of subordination, stemming from the need to evade confrontation, forced displacement, or individual harm. However, this way of life is an anomaly that should be eradicated. People should not have to live in a state of continual anxiety. Therefore, in the concluding section of this article, we emphasize the need to: cease the conflict; hold the perpetrators accountable on both ends of the borders; ensure reparation for the civilians affected by this war; ensure assisted return; and guarantee the rights of individuals not to be displaced.

## **5. Conclusion**

### *5.1 Cease the Conflict*

The situation remains precarious, with hopes for continued mutual deterrence threatened by the risk of escalating rules of engagement, potentially turning the Twafan (Deluge) into a [tsunami in Lebanon](#). Numerous calls to cease the conflict have been made since October 8, 2023, when Hezbollah decided to support Hamas in Gaza. Despite appeals from the [UN](#), [UNIFIL](#), [the US](#), [France](#), [international and local NGOs](#), [local politicians](#), and [religious leaders](#), hostilities persist. Hezbollah has linked the cessation of military activities in South Lebanon to the cessation of IDF's military attacks on Palestinians. Dr. Fayad emphasizes that the critical solution to halting the devastation of Lebanon and its people is to reinstate the nation's established democratic and liberal pluralistic system. This entails complete adherence to the Taef Accord in its entirety, ensuring coexistence, and enforcing laws that regulate the presence of all components, sects, and denominations. Additionally, it demands the implementation of international legitimacy resolutions, such as [1559](#), [1680](#), and [1701](#), among other indispensable measures. Dr. Allouche warned, "The worst scenario would be if an international deal were struck between Israel and Iran's *Wilayat al-Faqih*, effectively making the Iranian-backed party the absolute ruler of Lebanon. In such a scenario, I believe Lebanon would be divided, with Christians gathering in the historical Mount Lebanon

region. Consequently, people in Hezbollah's controlled regions would leave voluntarily or be forced to do so, as one should not expect the behavior of the party in its controlled areas to differ from that of the Iranian authorities in Iran, namely imposing the political and social conditions of Wilayat al-Faqih on everyone. This would even affect those who align with or politically support the party under the banner of resistance, but who do not support Hezbollah's societal actions."

### *5.2 Hold the Perpetrators Accountable and Ensure Reparation for the Civilians Affected by the War*

Three parties are directly responsible for this war and must be held accountable: Israel, Hezbollah, and the current caretaker Cabinet of Lebanon. [Israel is accountable](#) for indiscriminate attacks, including the use of phosphorus bombs, which have led to civilian casualties and property destruction. [Hezbollah as an armed non-state-actor](#) is responsible for dragging Lebanon into Hamas's war with Israel by using Lebanese territory to launch attacks on Israel, thereby inviting retaliatory strikes that affect Lebanese civilians and property. The Lebanese state bears significant legal and moral responsibility. Legally, under international law, the Lebanese government is expected to maintain sovereignty over its territory, ensuring that non-state actors, such as Hezbollah, operate independently of state control. Furthermore, the Lebanese government has a moral responsibility, the primary duty of which is to protect its citizens from harm. The [Lebanese government failed](#) in its legal and moral responsibility. Consequently, the three parties are under obligation to pay [reparation](#) through a) financial compensation for the families of those killed, injured, or displaced, as well as for property damage; b) rebuilding infrastructure by restoring damaged homes, schools, hospitals, and public utilities to ensure a return to normalcy; c) psychosocial support by providing mental health services to help civilians cope with the trauma of war; and d) medical aid by ensuring access to medical care for those injured during the conflict. Dr. Fayad emphasizes the necessity of directing reparations through the government. She warns that failing to assist the southerners, regardless of their sect, will leave them susceptible to Hezbollah's control. Furthermore, if provided aid, they may become increasingly reliant on it.

### *5.3 Ensure the Right to Assisted Return*

Ensuring the right to [assisted return](#) for people displaced by conflict is essential for addressing the humanitarian crisis in South Lebanon. This right goes beyond just stopping the fighting; it involves making sure displaced individuals can safely and voluntarily go back to their homes and get the help they need to rebuild their lives. The Lebanese government, with international support, needs to prioritize these efforts to respect the dignity and rights of those displaced. This includes creating a safe environment free from further violence and putting systems in place for their long-term reintegration and stability. Effective implementation of these measures requires cooperation between local authorities, international organizations, and civil society to ensure a peaceful and stable environment in South Lebanon.

### *5.4 Guarantee the Rights of Individuals not to be Displaced*

The [right to not be displaced](#) stands as a cornerstone of human rights discourse globally, particularly as internal displacement has risen to the forefront of humanitarian concerns. At the heart of this issue lies the [UN Guiding Principles'](#) recognition of the right not to be arbitrarily displaced, which mandates that states ensure the protection of individuals facing displacement by upholding fundamental human rights

safeguards. In the context of the protracted conflicts in South Lebanon, where conflict-induced displacement has occurred repeatedly, the right to not be displaced gains heightened significance. These senseless wars have cost too many lives and billions of dollars in destruction, loss of economy, and reconstruction costs, impoverishing the people of Lebanon and forcing its youth into international migration, depriving Lebanon of the opportunity to flourish. As communities in South Lebanon and beyond grapple with the realities of forced displacement caused by such conflicts, it becomes imperative for all parties involved to uphold this fundamental human right. This entails ceasing the wars as a means to solve contentious issues between Lebanon and Israel, preventing displacement, ensuring the protection and dignity of affected populations, and supporting their right to return home. Only through such concerted efforts can the cycle of displacement be effectively addressed, allowing the people of Lebanon, particularly those in the South, to rebuild their lives in peace and security.

### *5.5 Replacing Hezbollah's Imposed Formula*

Hezbollah has [enforced a strategic defense trinity formula](#) in Lebanon, encompassing the Army, the People, and itself as the Resistance. Asserting a divine mandate to safeguard Lebanon, Hezbollah has granted itself the authority to conduct military and intelligence operations without the endorsement of the army or the approval of the populace. However, the validity of this equation has proven futile. The de facto exclusion of Lebanon's citizens is evident in the state's current security architecture. While including 'the people' in the security formula suggests public acceptance of state policy, the reality since the formula's adoption in 2008 is cosmetic. Ordinary citizens lack influence over the *modus operandi's* use by the state or Hezbollah's actions, and are unable to demand reform of Lebanon's security architecture. Hezbollah and its allies within the government swiftly label those who question the legitimacy of [Hezbollah's weapons](#) as traitors. They argue that the weapons are necessary for national security, despite their role in causing national destruction. This tactic effectively silences dissent and stifles any calls for reform or accountability. Hezbollah's armed activities have destabilized the state, eroded sovereignty, alienated friendly nations, and inflicted economic, environmental, and infrastructural damage. This unilateral formula and [Hezbollah's hegemony](#) have sparked concerns about the [militarization of Lebanese society](#) and the [divisive impact](#) of Hezbollah's military capabilities on national unity. Consequently, there is an urgent need to reform this imposed equation to one that prioritizes the interests of Lebanese citizens and fosters the emergence of a sovereign and neutral state. A public policy researcher, who wished to remain anonymous, said in his interview with us on April 12, 2024, "The Christians remain steadfast in their land. No despair. No fear. The times are tough, but hope is stronger. The Druze, like the Christians, Sunnis, and free Shiites, stand firm. Despite the catastrophic challenges, there is no turning back on the path to reclaiming the state." Dr. Hicham Hamdan, a retired career diplomat, said in his interview with us on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, that "the initiation of sovereignty restoration mandates a commitment to the ceasefire agreement, [The Armistice Agreement of 1949](#), which was signed by Israel, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. This agreement serves as the fundamental legal framework for managing the southern situation vis-à-vis Israel. All other resolutions from the Security Council stem from this agreement. In essence, Resolution 1701 cannot be enforced without prior affirmation that the international borders between Lebanon and Israel are those [internationally acknowledged in 1923](#) and reaffirmed in the ceasefire pact. Calling for the enforcement of the 1949 ceasefire agreement is a national imperative to safeguard rights and national assets, and to establish a lasting system of security and peace in the south."



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