



Lebanon Overview Mid-December 2018

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Glossary

IS	Islamic State
INGO	International Non-Government Agency
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product – used to determine the economic performance of a whole country or region, and to make international comparisons.
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

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In the text when '*Comment: ...*' appears in *italic* and the subsequent text is also in *italic*, this information is not fact, but the opinion of the author.

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Locations	Risk Level	Comment	Forecast
Beirut, Mount Lebanon (ML) & South Lebanon north of Litani River	Low	<i>In addition to the regular criminal & traffic threats faced in any major city, Beirut has the threats related to the religious & ethnic divides that define Lebanon. The situation can change quickly & there is the proliferation of small arms to fuel conflict. However, there are usually strong indicators prior to a major breakdown.</i>	<i>The creation of a new government is not guaranteed despite recent optimism. If a new government is formed, Lebanon's economic and social issues will not lessen.</i>
Beirut Neighborhoods Haret Hraik & Borjal Brajne, Tripoli, Zahle, Baalbek, South Lebanon south of Litani River	Moderate	<i>These neighborhoods in Beirut are prominently Shia & dominated by Hezbollah. South of the Litani River is also controlled by Hezbollah & requires permits to visit. Zahle & Baalbek have a high level of crime. Tripoli has extremist elements & frequent crime.</i>	<i>Hezbollah will continue to be a de-facto regime within Lebanon & is actively targeted by Sunni extremists & Israel. There are no indicators to suggest the security situation in Tripoli, Zahle & Baalbek will improve.</i>
5km from all borders, north of Baalbeck, north of Tripoli, Borjal Brajne & Ain el Helweh Palestinian Camps	High	<i>Border areas in the north & north of Baalbek have very high levels of crime including kidnap & illegal drug production. The north east was occupied by extremist groups for several years until 2017. The southern border with Israel is volatile. Palestinian camps are unpredictable & Ain el Helwah is particularly violent.</i>	<i>The situation in the north east has improved, & is expected to remain stable, possibly dropping to moderate. All border areas are expected to remain high risk especially the border with Israel.</i>

1. Domestic News

FAILURE TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT

More than seven months since parliamentary elections, Prime Minister-designate Saad al-Hariri has failed to form a national unity government. Attempts have been obstructed by conflicting demands for cabinet seats by opposing parties. Seats must be appointed in-line with a power sharing arrangement involving 18 different sects. A recent obstacle is Hezbollah demanding a cabinet seat for one of its Sunni allies. In mid-December a compromise was found that has raised hopes a government will be formed before the end of the year. The compromise involves the Hezbollah-linked Sunnis putting forward names of ministerial candidates acceptable to them, rather than insisting that they themselves should get the seat. In exchange, Hariri will have to acknowledge the political standing of the Sunnis as an party independent of Hariri's own Sunni party, the Future Movement.

WORSENING ECONOMIC SITUATION

Lebanon caretaker finance minister has warned the government has exceeded its budget for 2018 in order to meet the rising costs of health, electricity, garbage disposal and increased public sector wages. Lebanon has the world's third highest debt-to-GDP ratio that stands at 155% of GDP. The International Monetary Fund has warned major fiscal reforms are urgently needed to put the debt on a sustainable footing. Many politicians are warning that there is a risk of economic crisis if a new government is not formed soon.

CRIME AND CIVIL UNREST

For the first half of Dec 2018 the UNDSS recorded the following incidents from open source material:

- 10 Armed Conflict – These mostly involved Israeli army patrols briefly crossing over Lebanon's southern border. These patrols are not clashing with the Lebanese army or Hezbollah. The figures also include occasionally heavy clashes with criminal clans, see the report below.
- 1 Terrorist – An arrest of al Nusra suspect.
- 48 Crimes – Usually drug or gun related. Because of the proliferation of small arms in Lebanon personal disputes often involve shootings. There are also several shootings a month in the Palestinian camps due to the number of armed groups in camps.
- 18 Civil Unrest – Protests and demonstrations are a daily event in Lebanon, most are in Beirut.
- 6 Hazards – House fires and in winter road blocks caused by heavy to snow.

Note: The UNDSS figures are most likely incomplete and true figures are probably higher.

On night of 13 Dec 2018 on the outskirts of Ras Baalbek, Army units came under-fire from machine guns and were shelled (*Comment: Probably mortar fire*) by elements of the Jaafar clan. One soldier was killed and 3 were injured. In the following days the army erected checkpoints and conducted patrols in an attempt to apprehend the gunmen, who seemed to have escaped. *Comment: It was reported the incident was a revenge attack by members of the Jaafar clan following the killing of their relatives in an Army raid. The Jaafar clan is one of between 30 and 35 clans structured around extended families. Many are criminal mafias and mostly operate in Beqaa Valley. Criminal activities include cannabis cultivating, narcotics trafficking, kidnapping for ransom and car theft.*



HEZBOLLAH TUNNELS INTO ISRAEL

On 4 Dec 2018 the Israeli military started Operation Northern Shield to locate and destroy tunnels dug by Hezbollah from Lebanon into Israel. By the 16 Dec, using heavy drills and bulldozers, Israeli forces had to uncover 4 tunnels. This was confirmed by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) who also said that 2 of the tunnels cross the Blue Line in violation of UNSC Resolution 1701. Operation Northern Shield is in parallel with Israel's construction project to strength its northern border. This includes the building of a wall, deepening dry ravines, elevating natural cliffs and clearing vegetation. *Comment: It's assumed the purpose of the tunnels was to infiltrate Hezbollah fighters behind Israeli forces should Israel conduct another military incursion into south Lebanon. At the start of the operation tensions were raised on both sides with aggressive rhetoric from politicians and leaders. Even though tensions reduced the threat of an Israeli incursion remains. Israel views the growing military capability of Hezbollah with concern.*

HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN LEBANON ISSUE 33 – 1 August to 31 October 2018

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA-Humanitarian%20Bulletin-Issue33-2oct2018_EN_0.pdf 6

FIGURES As of 1 Nov 2018

- Number of estimated refugees 1,500,000
- Number of registered refugees 952,562
- Number of returnees 35,000
- Number of Palestine Refugees from Syria 32,000
- Number of Palestine Refugees from Lebanon 270,000
- Number of vulnerable Lebanese 1,500,000
- Total Lebanese population 4,400,000

SYRIAN REFUGEE RETURNS

In Nov 2018 Lebanon's General Security reported 779 Syrians refugees returned to Syria and that more than 80,000 Syrian refugees have left Lebanon since July, although only 7,670 have returned with assistance from the General Security. In returning the refugees the General Security coordinates with the Government of Syria; there is no involvement of the UNHCR. Lebanon's Hezbollah has also run a parallel programme for returns although it is unclear how many refugees have used this system.

In Nov, the caretaker Minister of State for Refugee Affairs, Mouin Merehbi, challenged the General Security on its returnee numbers. The minister claimed his ministry estimate from open sources only 55,000 returnees since Jun. He also believes at least 20 Syrian refugees who returned to their country have been killed by the Syrian army and allied paramilitary groups in recent months.

UNHCR and Western governments have warned that it is too early for large-scale returns of refugees to Syria as insecurity may lead to a second wave of displacement. Under international law governing the treatment of refugees, returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified.

