COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION BULLETIN

LEBANON

HEZBOLLAH-ISRAEL CONFLICT

19 JULY 2006

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This Country of Origin Information Bulletin contains the most up-to-date publicly available information as at 19 July 2006.
Older source material has been included where it contains relevant information not available in more recent documents.

1. Introduction

1.01   This Country of Origin Bulletin (COI Bulletin) has been produced by Research Development and Statistics (RDS), Home Office, to identify information about the recent escalation in the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel obtained from a wide variety of recognised sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.

1.02   This COI Bulletin has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum / human rights determination process.

1.03   The COI Bulletin is sourced throughout.   It is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain. It is not intended to be a detailed or comprehensive survey. For a more detailed account, the relevant source documents should be examined directly.

1.04   This COI Bulletin is intended to cover major developments that have taken place in Lebanon since publication of the Lebanon COI Report in July 2006 and must be read in conjunction with that.

1.05   This COI Bulletin and the accompanying source material are publicly disclosable. Where sources identified in the COI Bulletin are available in electronic form the relevant link has been included. The date that the relevant link was accessed in preparing the COI Bulletin is also included.

1.06   As noted above, the COI Bulletin is a collation of material produced by a number of reliable information sources. In compiling the COI Bulletin, no attempt has been made to resolve discrepancies between information provided in different source documents. For example, different source documents often contain different versions of names and spellings of individuals, places and political parties etc. Bulletins do not aim to bring consistency of spelling, but to reflect faithfully the spellings used in the original source documents. Similarly, figures given in different source documents sometimes vary and these are simply quoted as per the original text.

1.07   In producing this COI Bulletin, the Home Office has sought to provide an accurate, balanced summary of the available source material. Any comments regarding this COI Bulletin or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to the Home Office as below.

Country of Origin Information Service
Home Office
Apollo House
36 Wellesley Road
Croydon CR9 3RR
United Kingdom

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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html
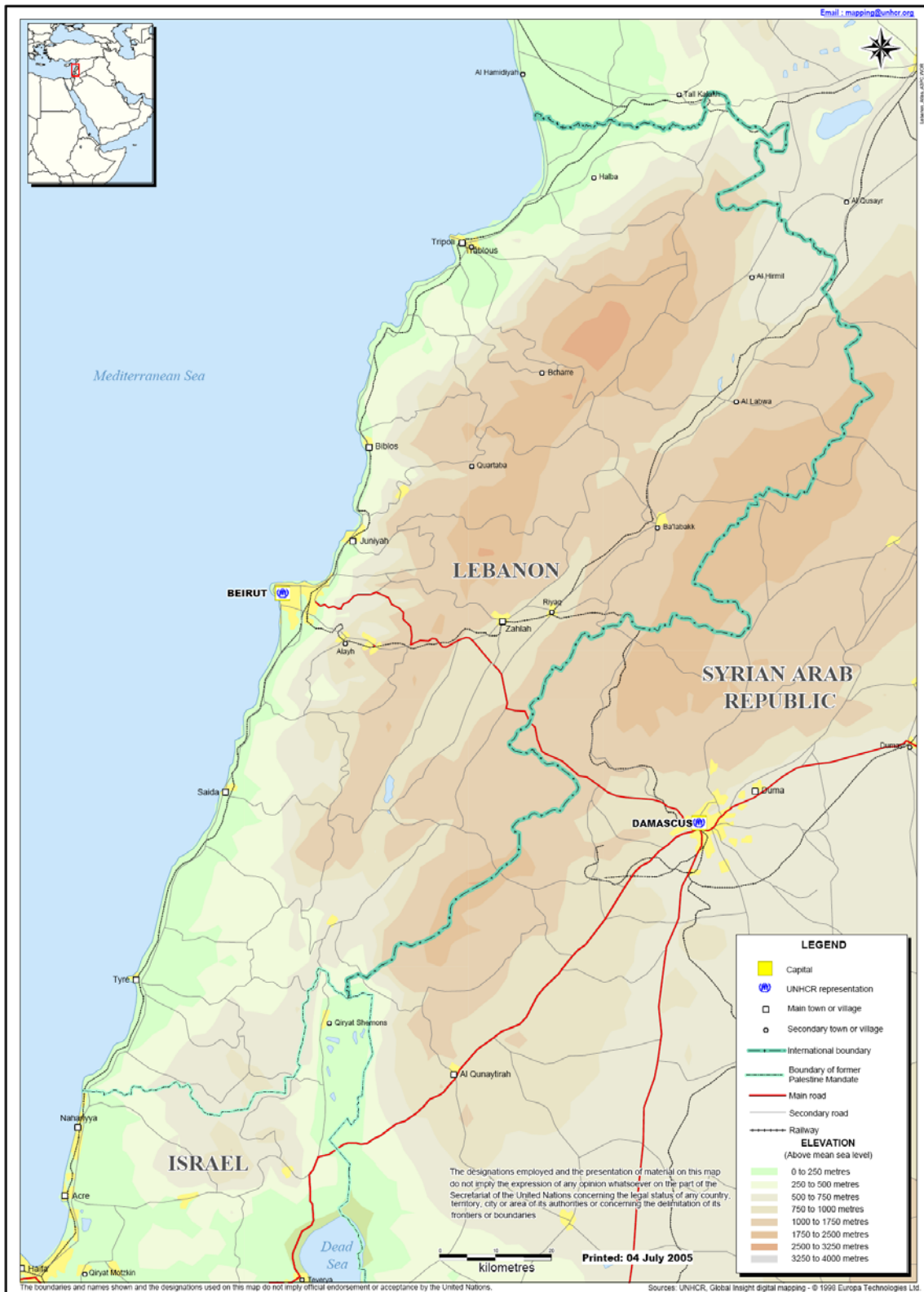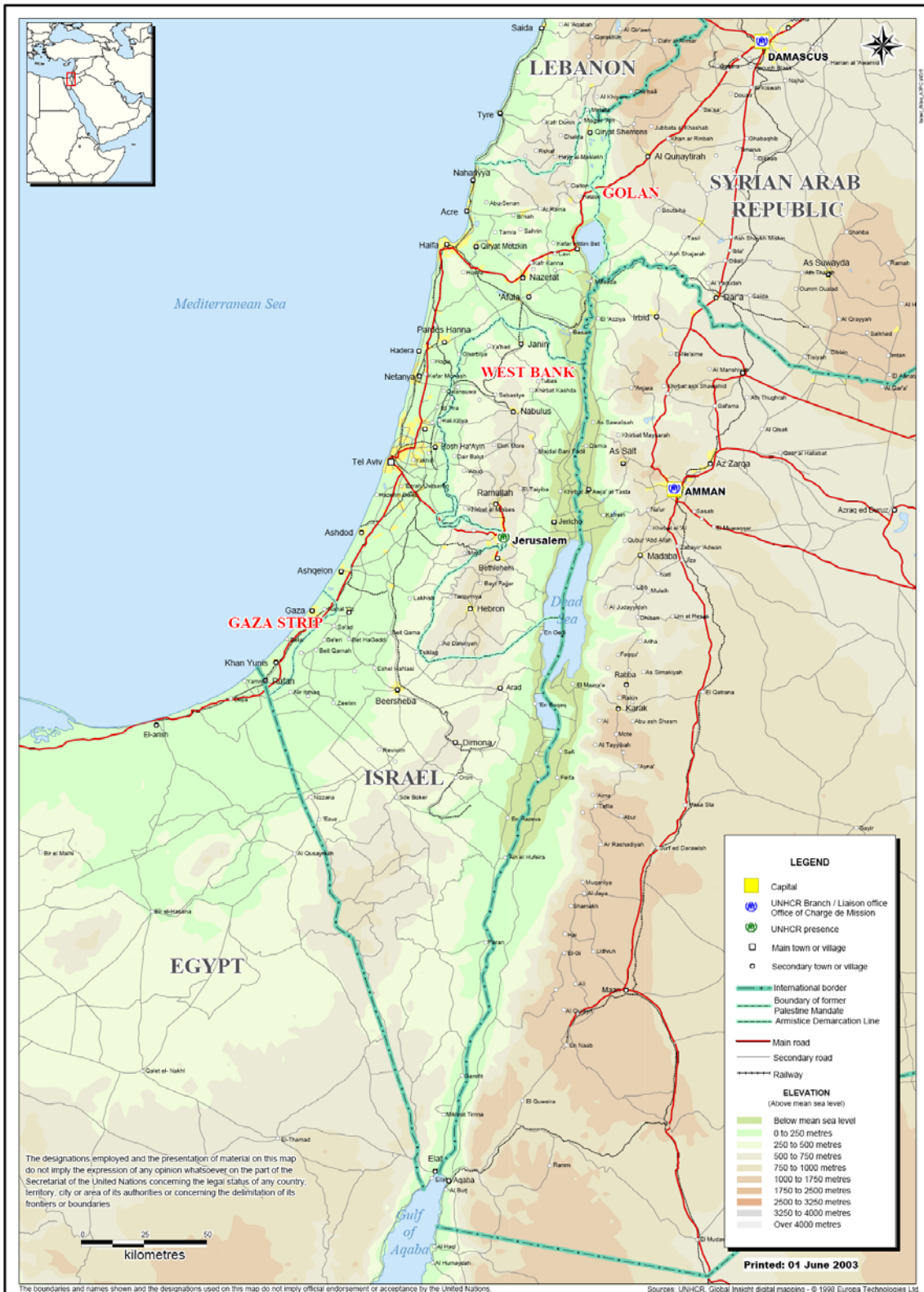
2. Maps

LEBANON

2.01   A United Nations (UN) map of Lebanon, bordered by Syria to the north and
        east, and Israel to the south. **[9a]**

ISRAEL

2.02   A UN map of Israel, bordered by Lebanon and Syria to the north, Jordan to the east and Egypt to the south. **[9b]**

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3. Escalation of the conflict

3.01   On 12 July 2006, the Lebanese Shia militant group Hezbollah launched a rocket attack on Israeli positions, and abducted two Israeli soldiers and killed three others during a cross border raid between the towns of Zar'it and Shtula. (BBC, 13 & 18 July 2006; CNN, 12 & 14 July 2006; IRIN, 13 July 2006; Aljazeera, 14 July 2006) **[1b, 1g] [2a, 2e] [3a] [4a]** The 'Blue Line' (a UN demarcation imposed to verify that the Israeli withdrawal of May 2000 was complete) has been the scene of Hezbollah-Israeli skirmishes, involving rocket attacks and air strikes throughout the six years since Israeli forces left the Lebanon. (BBC, 13 July 2006; CNN, 14 July 2006; IRIN, 13 July 2006; Aljazeera, 14 July 2006) **[1a] [2a] [3a] [4a]**

3.02   The Israeli response to Hezbollah's actions was to bomb Hezbollah positions and blockade Lebanon's sea ports whilst Israeli Defence Force (IDF) ground troops entered Lebanese territory for the first time since May 2000. (BBC, 12-14 July 2006 & 18 July 2006; CNN, 14 July 2006; Aljazeera, 14 July 2006) **[1b-1d, 1g] [2a] [4a]** The IDF ground troops sent into Lebanon to search for the two abductees encountered heavy resistance from Hezbollah, suffering the death of a further eight troops and the wounding of two others. (BBC, 12 July 2006 & 18 July 2006; CNN, 14 July 2006; Aljazeera, 14 July 2006) **[1b, 1g] [2a] [4a]** "After a night of Israeli air raids across southern Lebanon, Israeli jets strike the runways at Beirut's international airport in the morning, forcing the airport to close. Reports emerge of significant numbers of civilian casualties in Lebanese towns and villages close to Israeli targets, with at least 35 people reported killed." (BBC, 18 July 2006) **[1g]**

3.03   Over the next few days Israel continued its air attacks, targeting Hezbollah positions, as well as bridges, roads and fuel depots. (BBC, 12-14 July 200618 July 2006; CNN, 15 July 2006; IRIN, 16-18 July 2006; Aljazeera, 14 July 2006) **[1b-1d, 1g] [2d] [3b-3e] [4a]** Hezbollah's headquarters in southern Beirut were destroyed, the organisation's television station – Al Manar – was bombed and, by 17 July 2006, Israel's strikes had reached as far as the ports of Tripoli and Adeh in the north. (BBC, 17-18 July 2006; CNN, 15 July 2006; Committee to Protect Journalists, 13 July 2006; Reporters sans Frontières, 13 July 2006) **[1e, 1g] [2d] [7] [8]**   Hezbollah has countered by firing hundreds of rockets from Lebanese territory, which have reached as far as the towns of Haifa and Tiberias, and also bombing an Israeli missile boat – one of the Israeli navy's most sophisticated warships – using a Chinese-made, radar-guided C-802 missile. (BBC, 12-14 July 2006 & 18 July 2006; CNN, 15 July 2006) **[1b-1e, 1g] [2d]**

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3.04   News agencies continued to report extensively on developments in the region. The UN's Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) reported extensively on the rising number of Lebanese displaced by Israeli air strikes, quoting the International Committee of the Red Cross' estimate of 65,000 people on 13 July 2006 but, six days later, UN agencies' had estimated that 400,000 were displaced. **[3a-3f]** The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) released reports on the continued air strikes by Israeli jets on Hezbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon, and Hezbollah's continued bombardment of Haifa. **[1g]** The BBC's report 'Day-by-day: Lebanon crisis' of 18 July 2006 notes "The numbers of

Lebanese killed since the start of Israel's offensive is now climbing past 200, with 24 Israelis also killed." **[1g]**

3.05   Cable News Network (CNN) reported on the bombardment of an army barracks, which killed at least nine Lebanese soldiers, and recorded the UN Secretary General's (UN SG) calls for a strong international force to be sent to Lebanon. **[2b-2c]** Aljazeera also covered the UN SG's appeal for multinational force:

"'The proposed UN force would have to be more effective than the current UN interim force in Lebanon which has been unable to keep peace on the Israeli-Lebanese border.
'The force will be larger, the way I see it, much larger than the 2,000-man force we have there. I would expect a force that will have a modified and different concept of operation and with different capabilities.'" (UN SG Kofi Annan, 18 July 2006) **[4b]**

3.06   Aljazeera recorded that there were reports of Israeli strikes resulting in the destruction of civilian homes, ambulances, and trucks of medical supplies sent by the United Arab Emirates. **[4c]** The same report also noted that a ground invasion by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) had been considered and not ruled out, and stated that "'Israel will continue the battle against Hezbollah and will continue to strike targets belonging to the group until it obtains the release of its captured soldiers and restores the security of Israeli citizens,' Ehud Olmert was quoted as saying in a statement following talks with the UN team." **[4c]**

3.07   Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International released statements decrying the apparent targeting of, or at the least, lack of concern for civilian lives by both Hezbollah and Israeli forces, and HRW also released a 'Questions and Answers' paper on the conflict. **[5a-5d] [6a]** The organisation highlighted the IDF's bombing of a convoy of civilians fleeing southern Lebanon, and also Hezbollah's choice of weaponry: "Some of the rockets launched against Haifa over the past two days contained hundreds of metal ball bearings that are of limited use against military targets but cause great harm to civilians and civilian property." **[5c-5d]** Amnesty International (AI), meanwhile, urged the UN Security Council to urgently convene a meeting to draw up plans to protect the civilians affected by the deepening crisis, particularly in the face of the G8 member states' failure to make a definite, unified call for the ending of hostilities. **[6b]**

3.08   On the morning of the 19 July 2006, the BBC and CNN reported that Israeli ground troops had entered southern Lebanon. **[1h] [2b]** IRIN reported on the same day that the UN Security Council, which met on Monday, had made a majority decision to defer any reaction to the ongoing crisis until after the UN's high-level team had reported back to the Secretary General. **[3f]**

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Annex A: Chronology of events – Hezbollah-Israel

1982   **6 June:** Following the attempted assassination of Shlomo Argov, Israeli ambassador to Britain, Israel launched a full-scale invasion of Lebanon with about 60,000 troops. 'Operation Peace for Galilee' was a push to destroy the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), and forced Arafat and the PLO to flee Lebanon in **August**. **[1a] [2a]** The occupation of south Lebanon, including Beirut, a move designed to prevent Palestinian attacks, led to the suspension of peace initiatives, and the pro-Israeli Christian South Lebanon Army (SLA) commiting a series of massacres and human rights abuses. **[4a]**
14 September: The Israel-backed Lebanese president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, was assassinated, shortly before his inauguration. Israeli troops entered West Beirut a day later, and the next day, nearly 800 Palestinian refugees were massacred by Lebanese Christian militias in the Sabra and Shatila camps. Israel was accused of doing nothing to prevent or stop the massacre. **[2a]** Hezbollah, a fundamentalist Shiite Muslim militant group, emerged as a force in Beirut, the Bekaa Valley and southern Lebanon. Sponsored by Iran, modeled after Iran's Revolutionary Guards and supported by Syria, Hezbollah aims to establish a Shiite Islamic state in Lebanon and force Western interests like Israel and the United States out of the region. **[2a]**

1983   **18 April:** A suicide attack by Hezbollah on the U.S. Embassy in West Beirut killed 63 people, a harbinger of future attacks against U.S. and Western interests. **[2a]**
17 May: Lebanon and Israel signed a U.S.-brokered peace agreement, spelling out terms of Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, conditional on the withdrawal of Syrian forces. Syria opposed the agreement. **[2a]** An ending of hostilities, a partial withdrawal and the establishment of a security or 'buffer' zone in southern Lebanon was agreed. **[1a] [2a]**
23 October: A Hezbollah suicide bomber blew up the headquarters of U.S. Marine and French forces in Beirut killing 298 people including 241 U.S. Marines and other military personnel, and 56 French paratroopers. **[1a] [2a]** The responsibility for the attack was claimed by two militant Shia groups. **[1a]** U.S. troops were withdrawn from Lebanon a few months later. **[2a]**

1984   **March:** With pressure mounting from Syria, Lebanon cancelled the **17 May 1983** peace agreement. **[2a]**

1985   **June:** Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon but retained control of the 12-mile-wide security zone in the south. Most Israeli troops are withdrawn, but the SLA, led by Maj-Gen Antoine Lahd, continued to operate in the security zone with the support of some Israeli soldiers. **[1a] [2a] [4a]**
16 June: A TWA plane landed in Beirut having been hijacked on a flight from Athens to Rome by two alleged members of Hezbollah who demanded the release of Shia in Israeli jails. The crisis was resolved with the help of Syrian mediation. **[1a]**

1987   **21 May:** Lebanon abrogated the **1969** Cairo agreement with the PLO as well as officially cancelling the **17 May 1983** agreement with Israel. **[1a]**

1989   **28 July:** Shaykh Abd-al-Karim Ubayd, Hezbollah leader in Jibshit, was abducted by Israeli forces. **[1a]**

1990   **13 October:** The Syrian air force attacked the Presidential Palace at B'abda and Awn takes refuge in the French embassy. This date is regarded as the end of the 15-year civil war. **[1a] [2a]**

1991   The National Assembly ordered the dissolution of all militias by **30 April** although Hezbollah was allowed to remain active whilst the South Lebanon Army (SLA) refused to disband. **[1a]**

1992   Israel assassinated the secretary-general of Hezbollah, Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi, when Israeli helicopter gunships attacked his motorcade on a road south-east of Sidon. **[1a] [4a]**
By **17 June** all Western hostages held by Shia groups have been released. **[1a]**

1993   **25 July:** Israel attempted to end the threat from Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) in southern Lebanon by launching 'Operation Accountability', its heaviest attack since 1982. **[1a] [2a] [4a]**

1994   **21 May:** Mustafa Dib al-Dirani, head of the Believers' Resistance, a breakaway group from the Shia Amal organisation, was abducted by Israeli commandos from his house in eastern Lebanon. **[1a]**

1996   **11 April:** 'Operation Grapes of Wrath', a 16-day battle in which the Israelis bomb Hezbollah bases in southern Lebanon, the southern district of Beirut and the Biqa, resulted in the death of at 137 people who were mostly Lebanese civilians. **[1a] [2a] [4a]**
18 April: An Israeli attack on a UN base at Qana resulted in the death of over 100 Lebanese refugees sheltering there. **[1a]**
26 April: US negotiated a truce and an 'understanding' under which Hezbollah and Palestinian guerrillas agreed not to attack civilians in northern Israel, and which recognised Israel's right to self-defence but also Hezbollah's right to resist the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Although Lebanon and Syria did not sign the 'understanding', the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group (ILMG) – whose members were drawn from the US, France, Israel, Lebanon and Syria – was set up to monitor the truce. **[1a]**

1998   **1 April:** Israel's inner cabinet voted to accept UN Security Council Resolution 425 of 1978 if Lebanon were to guarantee the security of Israel's northern border. However, both Lebanon and Syria rejected this condition. **[1a]**

1999   **3 June:** South Lebanon Army (SLA) completed its withdrawal from the Jazzin salient (north of the 'security zone') occupied since 1985. **[1a]**

2000   **5 March:** Israeli cabinet voted for the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon by July 2000. **[1a]**
18 April: Israel released 13 Lebanese prisoners held without trial for more than 10 years but extended the detention of Shaykh Abd-al-Karim Ubayd and Mustafa Dib al-Dirani. **[1a]**
Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak, announced the withdrawal of troops from southern Lebanon earlier than scheduled and – after the collapse of the SLA and rapid advances by Hezbollah – Israeli forces were completely withdrawn by **24 May**, six weeks before the state deadline of **7 July**. **[1a] [4a]**

25 May: declared an annual public holiday, called 'Resistance and Liberation Day'. **[1a]**
May: the United Nations established the 'Blue Line' as a border between the Lebanon and Israel. **[2a]**

2001   **March:** Lebanon began pumping water from a tributary of the River Jordan to supply a southern border village despite opposition from Israel. **[1a]**

2002   **January:** Elie Hobeika, a key figure in the massacres of Palestinian refugees in **1982**, died in a blast shortly after disclosing that he held videotapes and documents that challenged Israel's account of the massacres. **[1a]**
September: Israel threatened a return to military action against Lebanon over its plan to divert water from the Wazzani border river, which provided 10% of Israel's drinking water. **[1a] [4a]**

2003   **August:** car bomb in Beirut, which was blamed on Israel by Hezbollah and a Lebanese government minister, killed a member of the Lebanese militant group. **[1a]**
September: Israeli warplanes hit southern Lebanon in response to Hezbollah's firing antiaircraft missiles at Israeli planes in the area. **[2a]**
October: Israel and Lebanon exchanged gunfire in the disputed area known as Shebaa Farms. **[2a]**

2005   **14 February:** Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is assassinated. Pressure builds on Syria to withdraw its remaining troops from Lebanon, which it does in **April**. **[1a] [2a]**

2006   **July:** Hezbollah militants crossed into Israel, killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others in a bid to negotiate a prisoner exchange, a demand rebuffed by Israel whose Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, described Hezbollah's actions as an 'act of war'. Another five Israeli soldiers were killed after the ambush. Israel responds with a naval blockade and by bombing hundreds of targets in Lebanon, including Beirut's airport, Hezbollah's headquarters in southern Beirut and the group's Al Manar television station. Hezbollah responds with rocket attacks targeting northern Israeli cities. Fighting leaves dozens of Lebanese civilians dead and coincides with a two-week-old Israeli military campaign in Gaza in response to the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian militants. **[1a] [2a] [4a]** In response, Hezbollah fired more than 100 rockets at towns across northern Israel, including the country's third-largest city, Haifa, about 35km from the border. **[4a]**
Russia, the EU, Iran and some Arab states condemn the attacks but the US President, George Bush, says Tel Aviv has the right to defend itself. Israel rules out any prisoner exchange with Hezbollah. **[4a]**
As of **17 July**, some 2,000 foreign nationals had been evacuated from Beirut, but tens of thousands remained in the country but efforts to help them leave the country, mostly by sea, were increasingly stepped up over the next couple of days. **[1f, 1h] [2b]**
19 July: Israeli ground troops crossed into southern Lebanon to carry out what the army called 'restricted pinpoint attacks'. **[1h] [2b]**

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Annex B: List of source material

The Home Office is not responsible for the content of external websites.

1   British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
   a   Timeline: Lebanon. 13 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/819200.stm
        (Accessed 17 July 2006)
   b   Hezbollah seizes Israel soldiers. 12 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5171616.stm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**
   c   Israel pursues strikes on Lebanon. 14 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5178492.stm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**
   d   Israel steps up Lebanese strikes. 14 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5178774.stm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**
   e   UN calls for Lebanon peace force. 17 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5186474.stm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**
   f   Hundreds evacuated from Lebanon. 17 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5184134.stm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**
   g   Day-by-day: Lebanon crisis. 18 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5179434.stm **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**
   h   Dozens die in fresh raids. 19 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5193662.stm **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**
   i   Israel's Hezbollah headache. 16 July 2006.
        http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/5184974.stm **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**

2   Cable Network News (CNN)
   a   Timeline: Decades of conflict in Lebanon, Israel. 14 July 2006.
        http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/14/israel.lebanon.timeline/
        (Accessed 17 July 2006)
   b   Israeli troops enter southern Lebanon. 19 July 2006.
        http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/18/mideast/index.html
        (Accessed 19 July 2006)
   c   Annan calls for beefed up U.N. force in Lebanon. 18 July 2006.
        http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/18/mideast.annan.ap/index.ht
        ml **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**
   d   Israel strikes militant stronghold in Beirut. 15 July 2006.
        http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/15/mideast/index.html
        (Accessed 19 July 2006)
   e   Israel authorizes 'severe' response to abductions. 12 July 2006.
        http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/12/mideast/index.html
        (Accessed 19 July 2006)

3   UN Integrated Regional Information Network
   a   Red Cross braces for further attacks. 13 July 2006.
        http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54594&SelectRegion=Middle
        _East&SelectCountry=LEBANON **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**

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  b LEBANON: Hundreds displaced by Israeli attacks, say aid workers. 16 July 2006.
http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54629&SelectRegion=Middle_East&SelectCountry=LEBANON **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**

  c LEBANON: Displaced receive aid, but concern remain for those stuck in south.
http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54643&SelectRegion=Middle_East&SelectCountry=LEBANON **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**

  d LEBANON: Amid attacks, health workers warn of waning supplies.
http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54640&SelectRegion=Middle_East&SelectCountry=LEBANON **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**

  e LEBANON: Numbers of displaced peoples rise as attacks continue. 18 July 2006.
http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54665&SelectRegion=Middle_East&SelectCountry=LEBANON **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**

  f LEBANON: Security Council delays, awaits high-level UN team. 19 July 2006.
http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=54687&SelectRegion=Middle_East&SelectCountry=LEBANON **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**

4 **Aljazeera**

  a Timeline: Israel and Lebanon. 14 July 2006.
http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/013B1ECF-6E04-401E-A62F-2E70D849E39B.htm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**

  b UN seeks international force for Lebanon. 18 July 2006.
http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/080A36AE-1290-4A1A-90CA-7B0010650BC1.htm **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**

  c Lebanon toll passes 254. 18 July 2006.
http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/0529EDB8-8164-470C-BBB8-72734692D22C.htm **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**

5 **Human Rights Watch (HRW)**

  a Lebanon/Israel: Do Not Attack Civilians. 13 July 2006.
http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/13/lebano13736.htm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**

  b Questions and Answers on Hostilities Between Israel and Hezbollah. 17 July 2006. http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/17/lebano13748.htm **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**

  c Israel: Investigate Attack on Civilians in Lebanon. 17 July 2006.
http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/17/isrlpa13756.htm **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**

  d Lebanon: Hezbollah Rocket Attacks on Haifa Designed to Kill Civilians
http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/18/lebano13760.htm **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**

6 **Amnesty International (AI)**

  a Israel/Lebanon: End immediately attacks against civilians. 13 July 2006. (MDE 15/064/2006)
http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE150642006?open&of=ENG-LBN **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**

  b UN: Security Council must adopt urgent measures to protect civilians in Israel-Lebanon conflict. 18 July 2006. (IOR 41/012/2006)
http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGIOR410122006 **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**

7 **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**
Lebanon: Israeli forces strike Al-Manar TV facilities. 13 July 2006.
http://www.cpj.org/news/2006/mideast/lebanon13july06na.html **(Accessed 17 July 2006)**

8 **Reporters sans Frontières (RSF)**
Seven journalists and media workers injured in space of two days. 13 July 2006. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=18276 **(Accessed 18 July 2006)**

9 **United Nations (UN)**
a Map of Lebanon. July 2005. Via: http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/43E8F4FA8BA0CBE 9852571AE0057C55E/$File/unhcr_REF_lbn04072006.pdf?OpenElement **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**
b Map of Israel. June 2003. Via: http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Sa.nsf/luFullMap/9C163BED5551EE7 185256E610060FB5E/$File/unhcr_isr010603.pdf?OpenElement **(Accessed 19 July 2006)**

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