

**Forum:** Historical United Nations Security Council

**Issue:** Beirut Barrack Bombing in 1983

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## Introduction

Lebanon's history in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is particularly tragic. It went from being a prosperous tourist hot spot to a war-torn country that was destroyed by the sectarian tensions amongst its many peoples. Beirut was referred to as the Paris of the Middle East in the 1960s. However, by the 1980s, owing to the Lebanese civil war that emerged in 1975, it was torn in half by bloody fighting between Muslim and Christian factions who sought to further their own agendas. It can be stated that the cause of the civil war in Lebanon's rich heritage of religious diversity was poorly managed by a government system that failed to create a sustainable political infrastructure for the Lebanese people. In 1982 U.S. Marines began a peacekeeping mission as part of multinational forces mostly consisting of France and U.S. armies in the Lebanese Civil War. Marines were to maintain a visible presence in the capital of Beirut which aims to deter further bloodshed amongst the various warring factions and militias fighting for the control of the county. On October 23, 1983, Hezbollah carried out a terrorist bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, killing 241 U.S. military personnel, including 220 Marines 18 sailors, and three soldiers along with numerous civilians.

To fully comprehend the status quo of Lebanon, the history of the Civil War, the international conjuncture, ethnic diversity, and interventions of military organizations/groups along with countries will be detailly discussed.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Sect:**

A sect is a religious group that exists inside of a larger religion. Think of it as a section of a particular religion. For instance, in Islam, there are Sunni sects and Shia sects.



Despite the fact that both sects are under the name of the same religion which is Islam, their practices and beliefs have huge differences in certain topics.

### Sectarian:

Sectarian is a word to describe something having to do with smaller groups or sects. Sectarian, as a noun, is a member of a group with a particular set of interests. If you're a religious sectarian, you are loyal to a particular religious sect or group. Sectarian violence, for example, would describe the violence that has erupted between conflicting groups or sects.

### Demilitarize:

When a government removes its military forces, it demilitarizes the area those troops once occupied. This can happen because a conflict has ended or for political or financial reasons.

### Ceasefire:

A ceasefire (or truce), also spelled cease-fire, is a temporary stoppage of a war in which each side agrees with the other to suspend aggressive actions. Ceasefires may be declared as part of a formal treaty, but they have also been called as part of an informal understanding between opposing forces.

### *Status quo:*

The general state of things; the combination of circumstances at a given time, the current situation.

### *Civil War:*

A war in which opposing groups of people from the same country fight each other in order to gain political control over a region/territory. An instance of a Civil war is the Spanish Civil War.



## Militia:

A group of people trained as soldiers, who are not part of the permanent army.

## Background Information:

### The diverse structure of Lebanon:

The Middle East has a rich tradition of religious and ethnic diversity. This diversity is exemplified by the modern state of Lebanon. The country has a large population of Christians split mainly between the Maronites and the Greek Orthodox Community. Muslims also make up a large percentage of it consisting of both Sunnis and Shias.

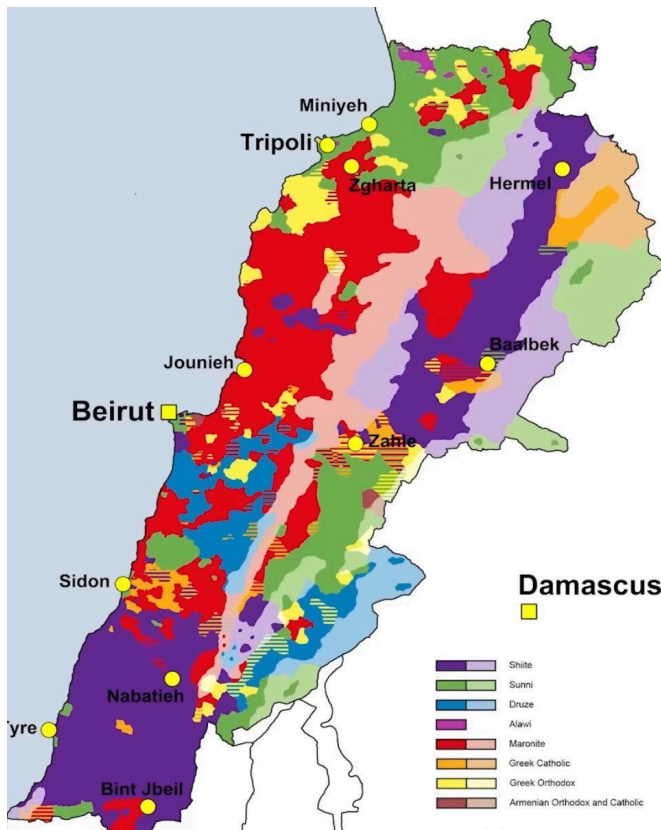


Figure 1: A map showing the distribution of ethnic and religious minorities as well as proving the diverse structure of Lebanon.

Moreover, numerous minority groups such as Jews can not be ignored in the process of understanding the diversity of Lebanon. For the Lebanese people the diverse structure of Lebanon was taken advantage of by modern imperial powers who sought to play the different ethnic and religious groups against one another to further seek their own interest in the Middle East. For a more detailed perspective of diversity in Lebanon, take a glance at Figure 1. Overall, Lebanon has a grand total of 18 officially recognized religious sects which makes dividing power a particularly strenuous and significant task. According to the

census carried out in 1932, Christians at a 51% majority which resulted in a political system that has given the Christians a greater say in running the affairs of the country. This caused numerous disagreements in Lebanon throughout the first half



of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until 1943. In 1943, Lebanon gained independence from France. Shortly after the establishment of Israel, the subsequent conflict it produced resulted in over 100 thousand refugees fleeing north to Lebanon. Many felt that the arrival of the largely Sunni Palestinians would upset the delicate sectarian balance which resulted in their exclusion from fully integrating with Lebanese society.

### The period from independence to civil war and the reflection of the Cold War in Lebanon (1942-1975):

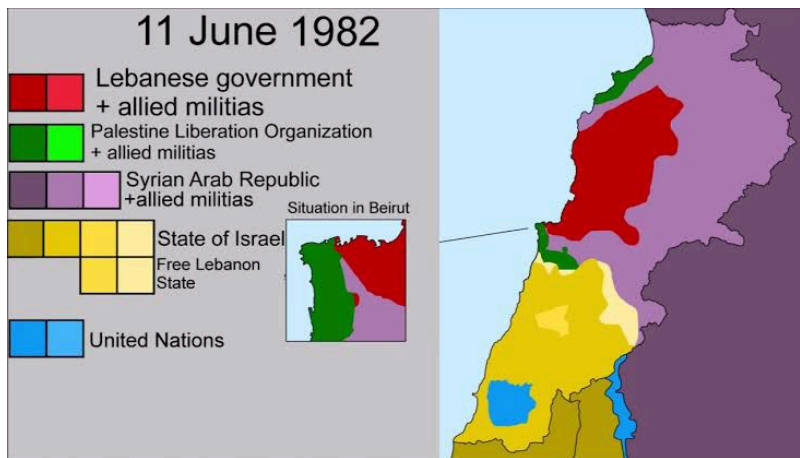
In 1952, the Maronite Camille Chamoun became president. He was notable for his unbridled support of the United States of America. An unpopular popular position in a region where Jamal Abdul Nasser's brand of Arab socialism was gospel. Discontent grew especially among Muslims who not only had great sympathy with pan-Arab ideas but felt underrepresented in government. When pro-Chamoun troops fired on a group of protesters in May 1957, killing 7 and injuring 73, tensions were ignited. The following month pro-Chamoun candidate won an overwhelming majority in parliamentary elections and the opposition publicly denounced it as fraudulent. In May 1958, when a newspaper editor who criticized Chamoun's government was assassinated. Anti-government and anti-American riots broke out. Many governments accused Nasr of provoking Sectarian conflict and preventing a peaceful atmosphere in Lebanon. Chamoun requested help from the United States of America to secure his position as president of the country. U.S. marines were deployed in Lebanon to ensure the Americans did not lose a valuable ally in the region. United States of America (USA) allied with Chamoun to prevent Communist ideas and governments from spreading in the Middle East. The troops withdrew in the same year. As a compromise between the two sides, the slightly more moderate Fuad Chehab was appointed president. Civil war was avoided.

This crisis took two forms: a proxy war between Capitalists and socialists which is typical in the Cold War and the sectarian conflict between Muslims and Christians. The 1960s were calm and prosperous. During the 1960s tourism became an important part of an economy. For a short period of time, national and international



affairs were going smoothly. However, in such a volatile part of the world, disputes in other countries tended to trickle over.

### The Civil War:



In 1967, the six-day war between Israel and Arab countries brought even more Palestinian refugees to Lebanon. A problem was confounded in 1970 when the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was an armed and foreign force,

was forcibly expelled from Jordan and had to move its base to Lebanon. Although the PLO concerned many Lebanese, especially Maronites, many Sunnis welcomed the guerrillas who they considered as equalizing the balance of power that had so long been tipped in favor of Christians. The precedence of the PLO brought to the surface ideological and sectarian conflicts that had previously been avoided. While taking into consideration the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War, historians tend to point out one or two specific incidents as the starting point of the conflict. In reality, it was the result of an accumulation of tension that has been ongoing between different ethnic and religious groups for decades. The former mayor of Sidon Maaroug Saad was assassinated by Lebanese army members. His funeral was attended by thousands of both Muslim Lebanese and many Palestinians living in the city. The funeral evolved into a massive demonstration and protests sometimes violent erupted across the country. More than a dozen were killed by the state security forces. The circumstances of a conflict were brewing. It became clear that Civil War emerged in 1975. As a result, armed clashes began. In the following years,



the various militia groups rendered the Lebanese military ineffective. Christians were expelled in mass from west Beirut as the PLO and their allies ranging from communists to Shia Islamists made rapid gains. In December of 1975, following the assassination of four of its members by a group of Muslims, The Kataeb Party, which is officially known as Kataeb Party - Lebanese Social Democratic Party, set up a checkpoint once again. Lebanese ID cards stated religion on them, which meant that the Kataeb Party could kill on a sectarian basis. Around 400 Muslims and Druzes were killed that day which is known as Black Saturday. In the following years, numerous massacres were committed by the Kataeb Party in predominantly Palestinian neighborhoods. As Vengeance, the PLO violated and slaughtered hundreds of Christians in Damour in a brutal way. The conflict would prove to be one of the most complicated in modern history since alliances constantly shifting and the war goes through various phases. Things were not complex at least in the early phases of the Civil War, combatant militia groups were largely divided between the Maronite-dominated Lebanese front and the Lebanese National Movement that incorporated leftist, Palestinian, Shia, Sunni, and Druze organizations. To confound matters further, the conflict saw several foreign countries get involved. Besides the involvement of the USA, which will be discussed further in this study guide, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics within the context of the Cold War, neighboring Syria invaded in 1976 under the guise of an Arab peacekeeping mission. Initially intervening on the side of the Maronite Christians, Syrian support would constantly shift between different militia groups. In 1978, Israel also invaded southern Lebanon in response to Palestinian attacks on its soil. Four years later, they would invade again by allying themselves with the Lebanese Christian militias. The Israelis went on to besiege Beirut and even forced the PLO to move their headquarters to Tunisia. The Lebanese Civil War would finally come to an end in 1990. Beirut had been split in half by the green line that saw mainly Muslim factions take control of west Beirut whilst Christian militia groups used east Beirut as their headquarters in the city.



### The intervention of U.S and Beirut Barrack Bombings:

The conflicts in Lebanon that preceded Marine involvement in 1982, were complex with the roots of violence tracing back as it is explained above. The immediate cause of the fighting in the 1980s that precipitated Marine involvement directly stemmed from the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948 and 1967 which led to the presence of PLO in Lebanon. The increasing friction between factions ignited a civil war in 1975 between PLO Christian and Muslim forces. While these were the major combatants three major religious groups and 49 different sects and political factions all vied for power. At the request of the Lebanese government Syrian troops restored order to the region and remained in the country under the Arab League mandate. However, PLO forces remained and used Lebanon as a base of operations for harassing attacks on Israel. The USA and international community unsuccessfully sought a resolution to the fighting and Israel invaded southern Lebanon in 1982 to defeat the PLO. Superior Israeli forces quickly reached the outskirts of Beirut the capital of Lebanon located on the coast of The Mediterranean Sea. The US spearheaded the resolution to the conflict by proposing the evacuation of PLO fighters from Beirut. though the evacuation briefly ended the fighting, three assassinations of newly elected Lebanese president Bachir Gemayel followed by the massacre of pales refuges in Beirut camps shattered any hopes for lasting peace. With Lebanon descending back into instability and chaos, President Ronald Reagan ordered the 32<sup>nd</sup> Marine Amphibious Unit to Beirut as part of the multinational Force. On 29 September 32<sup>nd</sup> Marine Amphibious Unit landed on the coast of Lebanon and occupied positions around the Beirut International Airport. The Marines' Mission revolved around the concept of providing presence. American political leaders thought that the presence of all Marines would deter the warring factions from fighting and provide time for the Lebanese government to retain control of the situation. The Marine's time in Beirut was relatively peaceful with the exception of Marines killed during mine-sweeping operations in the occasional stray bullet of small arms fire from the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Marines spent the majority of time constructing defenses and building bonds with the local population and other multinational Force troops. Throughout





their deployment, the Marines did not engage in any Combat, and on 30 October 1982, the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Unit relieved them. The 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious expanded the mission of presence during their deployment to Beirut. To increase visibility the Marine conducted motorized and foot patrols throughout parts of the city. During this period, the Marines also began specialized training for members of the Lebanese Armed Forces. Surprisingly the biggest threat to the Marines during this deployment came from the Israeli defense forces. Israeli Forces occasionally ambush by PLO Forces which the Israelis suspect of hiding within the Marine's area of operation. In response, the Israelis probed Marine positions and often fired into Marine areas of operations when engaging PLO fighters. Confrontations between the Marines and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) became increasingly common during this deployment and nearly resulted in the exchange of fire. To avoid further misunderstanding, diplomatic negotiations between the Israelis and Americans resulted in better communications and the hard definition of respective military lines. On February 15, 1983, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Amphibious Unit relieved the 24<sup>th</sup>. Marines of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Amphibious Unit were already familiar with the mission and were moved into their old positions. On 17 April, an unknown enemy shot and nearly wounded a marine who then returned fire with the results unknown. This was the first time Marines returned fire in Beirut. But this event was overshadowed the next day. On 18 April, when the terrorist detonated a truck bomb at the U.S. embassy in Beirut and killing 63 people 17 of whom were Americans. The embassy bombing effectively changed the mission and rules of engagement for the Marines. The Marines could not return fire if they perceived a threat. On 29 May, the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious unit landed in Beirut to relieve the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The first week, of the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious units' deployment were relatively quiet. The Marines who continue to patrol and train Lebanese Armed Forces troops, the latter creating the animosity from various anti-Lebanese Armed Forces factions and militias. Any doubt that Marines were target of these militias ended on 22<sup>nd</sup> July when the Marine positions at the Air Force received small arm rocket and mortar fire. The situation in Beirut further deteriorated in August as the IDF prepared to leave their positions around the





capital as part of an agreement signed by Israel and Lebanon. The presence of well-equipped Israeli Forces had deterred much violence in Beirut but as they began to withdraw, the fighting between various factions flared up and leaving the multinational force stuck in the middle. Lebanese Armed Forces attempted to fill the role of IDF but they were less well-trained and equipped. As the fighting escalated, Marines found themselves on the receiving end of both stray and targeted rounds. On August 28<sup>th</sup>, the fighting around the Airport raced a crescendo as the Lebanese Armed Forces engaged militia groups in the nearby neighborhoods. During this time more than 100 rounds of mortar and rockets landed within the Marine positions at the airport. Fighting continued to increase throughout September until the complete withdrawal of the IDF on September 4<sup>th</sup>. In addition to these intense combat engagements during this period, other developments signaled a shift in American policy towards the Lebanon crisis. Though the multinational force was supposed to be a neutral peacekeeping force, its actions signaled otherwise. Lebanese militias resented the Marine's effort to train Lebanese Armed Forces, it prompted them to attack Marine positions. Any claims for American neutrality were further negated when U.S Navy ships fired their guns in support of Lebanese Armed Forces units that reported being in danger of being overrun by militia groups in 19 September 1983. Despite the ceasefire at the end of September, sporadic heavy fighting continued in October and Marines continued to take casualties. Then on the morning of 23 October, disaster struck for the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Unit at 6.22 a.m. A Mercedes-Benz truck loaded with 2000 pounds of explosives crashed into the lobby of the Battalion Landing Team (BLT) building and detonated. The BLT building housing more than 200 men completely collapsed into a pile of rubble almost instantaneously. The compressed gas-enhanced bomb was detonated by the suicide truck bomber. It was the largest non-nuclear explosion ever recorded. Working parties and medical teams dispatched from naval ships offshore accelerated rescue operations and save countless marines. The blast had killed 3 soldiers, 18 sailors and 220 marines. Marines had to handle not only recovering the survivors but also identifying the dead marines. The process was slow and painful



for the families back in the United States. By 30 October, all remaining marines were located and transferred to planes to their final flight home to the U.S. As the deployment continued into 1984, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Amphibious Unit continued to reinforce their positions and build better fortifications. In the end, the Marines and Multinational Force presidents were contingent on the success of the Lebanese government in the Lebanese Armed Forces. The fighting between the Lebanese Armed Forces and militias intensified rapidly in February. During this time Muslim troops of the Lebanese Armed Forces began damaging the Lebanese Armed Forces' fighting capability. As the situation became critical, Marines began evacuating civilians from Beirut on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 22<sup>nd</sup> Marine Amphibious received orders for redeployment at the end of February.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United States of America

With 241 American service members killed in the attack, the U.S. Marine Corps sustained the greatest casualties. During the Lebanese Civil War, the Multinational Force was stationed in Lebanon with the purpose of maintaining regional stability. As it aforementioned, U.S. Marine Corps was the subject of the Beirut Barracks bombing in 1983, even though they were deployed for peacekeeping missions. The United States redeployed his last Marine Amphibious at the end of February 1984. The bombing had an influence on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

### France

France also had troops stationed in Beirut as part of the Multinational Forces. The French military barracks were attacked almost simultaneously with the U.S barracks, resulting in the death of 58 French paratroopers.

### Lebanon

Though not explicitly named in the immediate aftermath, Hezbollah, a Shiite militant group backed by Iran and Syria, was later held to emerge as a significant



force in Lebanon and opposed the presence of Western peacekeepers. They are also responsible for the Beirut Barracks Bombing in 1983.

### Iran

Iran was implicated in providing support and backing to Hezbollah. Iran's involvement was seen as part of its broader strategy to exert influence in Lebanon and the region.

### Syria

Syria was also accused of complicity, as it had significant political and military interests in Lebanon and supported various militant groups, including Hezbollah.

### Israel

Israel played a significant and multifaceted role in the Lebanese Civil War, had implications for broader regional dynamics and the context in which the Beirut Barracks Bombing occurred. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 to expel PLO from southern Lebanon. Moreover, Israel provided military and financial support to various Christian Militias which was an acting force in the Civil War. Israel's involvement in Lebanon during the Civil War was a critical factor in shaping the conflict's trajectory and had lasting implications for the region, including the rise of Hezbollah as a major political and military force.

### Hezbollah

On October 23, 1983, Hezbollah killed 241 U.S military personnel, including 220 Marines, 18 sailors and 3 soldiers in a terrorist bombing of the Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Hezbollah is a Shia militant group founded in Lebanon and supported by both Syria and Iran during the civil war. Hezbollah was opposed by Western forces in the region since they caused instability in Lebanon.

### Palestinian Liberation Organization

PLO activities and the broader Palestinian conflict had a significant impact on the region. The PLO's presence and operations in Lebanon were a major factor in the Lebanese Civil War, influencing the deployment of the Multinational Force. They are



held responsible for the escalation of the Civil War and allegedly the beginning of the Civil War since they caused instability and a shift of demographics in Lebanon.

### United Nations

The United Nations intervention in the context of the Beirut Barracks Bombing primarily involved the broader peacekeeping and stabilization efforts in Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War. Following the Beirut Barracks Bombing, the United Nations condemned the attack and called for an end to Civil War in Lebanese. United Nations advocated peace throughout the Civil War and supported Multinational Forces diplomatically to stabilize the region. While United Nations was not directly responsible for the Multinational Forces, its role in Lebanon during civil war involved diplomatic efforts, humanitarian support and peacekeeping through the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which is an establishment prior to Multinational Forces, in diplomatic ways aimed to foster stability and peace in a deeply fractured country.,

### Arab League

The Arab League played an important role in attempting to mediate and resolve the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 to 1990. The involvement of the Arab League includes various diplomatic initiatives, peacekeeping efforts, and support for political agreements aimed at ending the conflict. Despite these efforts, the league faced significant challenges due to the multifaceted nature of the conflict and the involvement of external powers. Even though their inefficiency during the war, the Arab League brokers a cease-fire which caused the Lebanese Civil War to end.

### Timeline of Events

<b>June 1976</b>	<b>Syrian Troops enter Lebanon</b>
<b>March 14, 1978</b>	<b>The invasion of Lebanon by Israeli Forces to wipe out PLO started</b>



<b>March 19, 1978</b>	<b>United Nations Security Council adopts Resolution 425</b>
<b>August 24, 1982</b>	<b>Multinational forces lands in Beirut and assist to the evacuation of the Palestine Liberation Organization</b>
<b>September 10, 1982</b>	<b>Multinational forces complete its withdrawal from Beirut</b>
<b>September 15, 1982</b>	<b>Israeli troops invaded West Beirut</b>
<b>April 18, 1983</b>	<b>The American Embassy in Beirut is attacked by a suicide bomb, killing many.</b>
<b>October 23, 1983</b>	<b>Beirut Barracks Bombing</b>
<b>February, 1984</b>	<b>Withdrawal of U.S Marine Amphibious completely from Lebanon</b>
<b>June 10, 1985</b>	<b>Israeli army withdrew from most of the regions they invaded in Lebanon</b>
<b>September 22, 1989</b>	<b>The Arab League brokers a cease-fire</b>
<b>October 13, 1990</b>	<b>The official end of the Civil War</b>

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Other Documents

There are numerous treaties and resolutions upon the Lebanese Civil War and Beirut Barracks Bombing from the UN and other international organizations. However, only significant ones are mentioned down below.

- [Cairo Agreement](#), 2 November 1969

An agreement between the Lebanese government and the Palestine Liberation Organization allowed the Palestine Liberation Organization to operate within Lebanese borders, contributing to internal tensions that led to civil war. The hyperlink is not going to direct you to the full text itself but to the unofficial text.



- [The Taif Agreement](#), 22 October 1989

Provided a framework for ending of the war and reformed political power-sharing among Lebanon's religious and ethnic communities. It was brokered by Lebanese parliamentarians with support from the Arab League.

- [S/RES/425](#), 19 March 1978

This resolution established the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) which aimed to confirm Israeli forces to withdraw from Lebanon. Moreover, the purpose of the resolution is to restore peace, and assist the Lebanese government in regaining authority in the region.

- [S/RES/426](#), 19 March 1978

Complemented Resolution 425, detailing the mandate and operational guidelines for UNFIL.

- [S/RES/520](#), 17 September 1982

This resolution condemned the attacks and the invasion of Israeli Forces in Lebanon. It highlights the Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

- [S/RES/521](#), 19 September 1982

This resolution is regarding the massacres committed in the region. Moreover, it condemned the massacre and called for the strengthening of UNFIL.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There are many official and unofficial peace attempts upon the Lebanese Civil War and the Beirut Barracks Bombing. Only compelling ones are mentioned down below. Besides, treaties and the role of international organizations are not mentioned in this section since they have already been discussed above.



### The Riyadh Conference

The Riyadh Conference was held in Saudi Arabia in 1976 with the participation of Arab League countries which led to the establishment of the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF). It primarily consisted of Syrian troops to stabilize the region and ensure a ceasefire was signed between the sides of the Civil War.

### The Geneve Conference

The Geneve Conference which was held in 1983 attempted to gather Lebanese leaders and factions to negotiate peace and distribution of power in Lebanon. The conference mainly focused on addressing political issues and possible ceasefire conditions. However, the conference failed to produce a long-lasting solution.

### National Dialogue Sessions

Numerous sessions were held in the 1980s and early 1990s. The purpose of these dialogues was to foster reconciliation among different sects and factions in Lebanese. Initially, it was inconclusive, however, it laid the groundwork for the eventual peace in Lebanon.

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