

THE 2026 WAR IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE:

Media Narratives Around National Issues

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GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE REPORT

1. Project Objective

Beginning in October 2023, Lebanon experienced a state of war along its southern border, with the intensity of hostilities fluctuating in response to regional and international developments. The conflict eventually expanded, with Israel invading the south and strikes reaching various areas across Lebanon, including the capital, Beirut. The war had a direct and significant impact on the country's domestic situation, given its immediate repercussions on all Lebanese citizens, the broader social and political context, and the tragedies it generated. Hezbollah became involved in the war against Israel as part of what it termed the "Gaza support front," beginning in early October 2023. In a subsequent phase, the confrontation developed into an open war between Israel and Hezbollah, encompassing large areas of Lebanon. However, Hezbollah's decision to "resist" Israel ran counter to the position of the Lebanese state, which considered Lebanon not to be a party to the war. The decision was also opposed by a significant segment of the Lebanese population, who accused Hezbollah of acting in the interests of external agendas.

These developments inflamed the domestic situation, as the country increasingly lived to the rhythm of the war, while Lebanese society became divided over it. Positions on and reactions to the war came to dominate the public sphere, across media outlets, social media, and various platforms, as they followed events that, given their significance and gravity, appeared to be determining the future of the country.

Against the backdrop of these exceptional developments, Maharat Foundation, in collaboration with the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, implemented a monitoring project that produced a series of Trends Watch Alerts tracking social and political discourse in the Lebanese public sphere.

The monitoring covered the period from April to June 2026, which witnessed a major escalation in the war following the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader and the outbreak of open warfare between Israel and Hezbollah.

**3 months of
monitoring**

April to June 2026

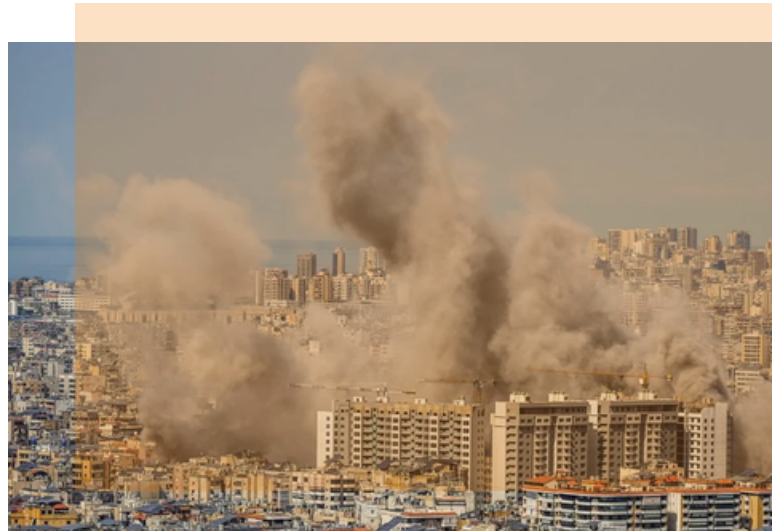


During these three months, the monitoring tracked coverage in the print press and on social media, as well as the discourse of influencers and opinion leaders, focusing on the issues and events that attracted significant attention across these channels. Such events were addressed in newspaper editorials, prompted statements or reactions from officials and opinion leaders, and became what is commonly referred to as a “trend” on social media. This monitoring enabled Maharat to identify the narratives that emerged around the war and examine what they revealed about political and social divisions and competing perceptions of the country.

This final report brings together and synthesizes the findings of all the Trends Watch Alerts produced during the monitoring period.



2. Significance of the Topic



Media and communication platforms play multiple roles in documenting events, presenting the positions of different actors, preserving collective memory, and performing other functions that researchers and historians draw upon when reconstructing historical events and the broader social context of a given period. Journalists record history as it unfolds, documenting facts, observations, and statements that subsequently constitute key material for writing the broader historical record. In this sense, journalists are both custodians of memory and chroniclers of events. Above all, however, media reflect the political and social realities of a country and reveal the various currents, divisions, and orientations within public opinion, as well as the positions of actors involved in political and social life.

Building on these functions, the report sought to examine how the print media and social media covered the war during the three-month period under review and to address a series of questions concerning their role: How did they cover the war? What did they document about it? What issues received their attention? How were the narratives and coverage across the press, social media, and opinion leaders interconnected? What “trends,” or issues, did these media prioritize, and how did they address them? What memory of this war are they preserving for future generations? What information and accounts will those who revisit these media sources in the years to come encounter? How much attention was given to citizens living through the horrors of the war? What narratives did the different actors advance, and how did the war appear when viewed through these multiple narratives?

3. Media and Social Media Narratives

The report's findings showed that media and social media platforms, through both their coverage and the positions they convey, reflect a deep divide within Lebanese society. They overwhelmingly portray two opposing sides and two contradictory narratives, as though society as a whole were engaged in a conflict in which no party is neutral and everyone perceives themselves as existentially involved.

These narratives were not limited to positions and opinions; they also conveyed discourse marked by resentment, drawing on a vocabulary characterized by accusations of treason, exclusion, hostility, and incitement.

Within these narratives, the “other”, a fellow member of the national community, is portrayed as an adversary and, at times, as an enemy. The other is accused of betraying the country and collaborating with a foreign enemy. Such accusations are presented as sufficient grounds for seeking to eliminate the other and even as a justification for the violence being advocated. Threats that the opposing side will eventually be “held accountable” therefore recur frequently and, in some instances, extend to threats of physical elimination. This represents the extreme end of verbal violence.





The narratives also reflect a struggle over identity and competing conceptions of the nation. They embody political projects on which the different sides do not converge, with each side seeking victory through the defeat of the other and the rejection of its propositions. Even official institutions intended to safeguard national unity, including the executive authority, the judiciary, and the security agencies, are themselves accused of treason and subservience, or alternatively of passivity and failure.

In this media coverage and in the positions advanced by the different actors, the citizen suffering the consequences of war, death, displacement, homelessness, and poverty, is largely absent. The media space is often dominated by politicians, who monopolize both the narratives and the public sphere. Yet behind every displaced family, every victim, and every destroyed home lies a narrative that receives little attention. This is a media environment that chronicles politicians, their activities and statements, and competing political projects, while documenting primarily what serves its own political objectives. It is often an ideologically driven media landscape oriented toward predetermined objectives, recording only what aligns with its own direction. This is particularly evident in wartime, when public and individual freedoms recede and media outlets become one of the instruments of the conflict.

The underlying principle is that ideologically driven and directed media contribute to the “subjugation” of the public, whereas independent media empower individuals by providing them with unembellished facts that enable them to form their own opinions. Neither the press nor social media, broadly speaking, sought to foster a public opinion capable of questioning and holding actors accountable. Instead, they sought to win public opinion over to their side in the battle they were waging alongside the conflicting parties.



This report does not seek to examine the multiple reasons behind the polarization of the press under these circumstances, but rather to consider its consequences. These consequences are not limited to the narratives surrounding this particular war; they extend to Lebanon's recurring tragedies, which the media fail to adequately revisit, draw lessons from, or examine in ways that could help prevent their recurrence.

Each narrative has constructed its own selective memory. The emphasis is no longer on a shared national collective memory capable of fostering unity, but rather on a distinct memory for each group, shaped according to its particular objectives and used to nurture its audience's aspirations and promises of victory and revenge against the other. These narratives may, however, offer one potential value: they can help researchers understand how public sentiment was inflamed and driven toward extreme positions, how fundamental issues and facts were obscured, and how the "other", despite being a fellow citizen, was demonized.

4. What image is being portrayed of the Nation?

The narratives conveyed by the media and social media during wartime are, in reality, the narratives of a people, reflecting its broader political and social reality. They reopen the memory of the past, convey the suffering and conflicts of the present, raise questions about the future, reveal the extent of the divide among the country's social components, and bring to the fore questions about the future of the national entity that brings them together.

The prevailing discourse expresses deep distrust toward state institutions and the principal branches of authority, including the judiciary and security institutions. It reflects a deep divide among domestic actors, accompanied by an abundance of accusations of treason, and mutual recriminations. At times, this discourse escalates into threats of bloodshed, as the “other” within the country comes to be portrayed in terms similar to an enemy. This raises fundamental questions about the future of the political system at a time of profound division and disagreement over core concepts relating to the nation, coexistence, and social peace.

Within this landscape, media and social media appear to function primarily as instruments of conflict. They extend and amplify the positions of the different actors, who compete to occupy the public sphere. In doing so, they become confrontational platforms that foreground the arguments and positions supporting their respective orientations.

Meanwhile, moderate voices recede, as their positions are perceived as less compelling and fail to attract sufficient audiences to secure space on these platforms. Indeed, discourse advocating peace itself becomes subject to accusations of surrender or passivity.

Even the print press, arguably the more “refined” form of media given the greater time separating publication from the event, in contrast to other forms of communication driven by immediacy, largely adopted committed partisan alignments. Its narratives often moved in a direction that reinforced existing divisions, in the absence of conciliatory discourse capable of bringing the different sides closer together. Media platforms, including more established and serious outlets, became an echo chamber for confrontational positions. Meanwhile, “electronic armies” and many “popular” online platforms disseminated discourse characterized by extreme levels of insults, ridicule, exclusion, and violence, attracting thousands of expressions of support and “likes.”

The issue at stake is therefore no longer limited to the war, its tragedies, and the actors involved. It extends to the country’s entire social structure and the concepts defended by each side: perceptions of the enemy, understandings of sovereignty and independence, social priorities, and perhaps most concerning, the prevailing perception of the “other.” The other, despite being a fellow citizen, has been transformed into an adversary and, in some cases, an enemy whose elimination certain narratives seek to justify in the name of saving the nation.

These are confrontational forms of coverage and discourse whose visions of the present and future share few common denominators and largely lack consensus-oriented approaches. Both sides increasingly place their hopes on developments on the battlefield, with each advancing an approach it considers correct while accusing the other of being misguided and betraying the nation. Positions occupying the middle ground have consequently become marginalized, as have those who advocate them.

Themes of the Narratives

Among the most prominent themes that shaped the narratives of this period and were identified during the monitoring period were:

I- The Image of the State

- 1- Questioning the legitimacy of the authorities
- 2- The absent judiciary
- 3- The “subordination” of the security institutions

II- The Future of the Nation

- 1- Fear of the other
- 2- The struggle over identity
- 3- Competing narratives and the writing of history

III. The War in Media Coverage

- 1- Discourse of treason and violence
- 2- Media involvement in the war and the boundaries of freedom and responsibility
- 3- The absence of public-interest media and citizen-centered journalism



I-The Image of the State



The state is founded on a political structure around which constitutional institutions are established to guarantee the rights of groups and individuals, maintain security, and serve the interests of citizens. Among the most important of these institutions are the judiciary and the security forces, which operate under the supervision of the official authorities and are responsible for safeguarding security and stability.

However, these core state institutions, including the judiciary, security forces, and official authorities, have been subject to widespread questioning and structural criticism, undermining their image and weakening their role. As a result, the Lebanese state appears fragile and weak, inspiring little confidence either domestically or internationally.

1. Questioning the Legitimacy of the Authorities

The official authorities were subjected to a campaign questioning their legitimacy over their positions on the war taking place in southern Lebanon, initially because they did not engage in the war and, at a later stage, because they called on Hezbollah to hand over its weapons. Hezbollah and its supporters accused the authorities of colluding with the enemy, while Hezbollah's opponents criticized them for their hesitation, their failure to exercise control over decisions of war and peace, and for allowing Hezbollah to drag the country into war rather than confronting it.

Media outlets close to Hezbollah initially challenged the legitimacy of the authorities represented by President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, thereby also calling into question the legitimacy of decisions taken by these authorities: "...The manner in which the government was formed was not based on a balance reflecting popular legitimacy in Lebanon... From this perspective, the 'claim of legitimacy' appears meaningless, particularly in the cases of Aoun and Salam. Moreover, the practices they have pursued since assuming their duties open the door wide to reconsidering their constitutional, popular, and political legitimacy at this moment." [1]

1. Al-Akhbar newspaper, "Aoun and Salam: A Last Chance!", 16 April 2026

The pro-Hezbollah newspaper Al-Akhbar accused major foreign powers of bringing Aoun and Salam to office and denied that either possessed meaningful representative legitimacy, describing them as “strangers to the country and its people.” It argued: “...Their accession to the presidency of the Republic and the premiership resulted from a decision, pressure, and scenario devised by the United States in cooperation with Saudi Arabia, with a secondary role played by France and other foreign actors. [...] They completely lack any political or popular representation, which is important in Lebanon. Everyone knows that foreign powers have long intervened in the selection of presidents of the Republic, prime ministers, and even senior officials. However, such intervention usually took domestic balances into account, and most of those selected possessed genuine political, popular, or sectarian standing. As for those parachuted into office politically, as in the cases of Aoun and Salam, they eventually found themselves isolated in homes where grass had grown over the steps...” [2]

The criticism of the President then shifted toward personal attacks: “...For many of those who knew Aoun when he was commander of the army, or who came to know him after he became President of the Republic, the picture is clear in terms of his intellectual and political shallowness and even his limited knowledge of the most basic matters. He is nothing more than a military officer of the type who knows how to issue orders and expects quick and immediate results. When he put on the suit of the President of the Republic, he had already committed himself to Washington and Riyadh to everything demanded of him in exchange for their support in bringing him to the presidency.” [3]

2- Ibrahim Al-Amin, Al-Akhbar newspaper, “Don’t Ask About Joseph Aoun’s Mind?”, 18 May 2026

3- Ibrahim Al-Amin, Al-Akhbar newspaper, “Don’t Ask About Joseph Aoun’s Mind?”, Monday, 18 May 2026

Numerous hashtags conveying the same position also appeared, including “Joseph Aoun does not represent me.” Images of Prime Minister Nawaf Salam also appeared in the streets, some bearing the slogan “the treacherous agent.”

The accusations expanded beyond the two leaders to encompass the Lebanese authorities more broadly. Al-Akhbar accused the authorities of “conspiring” by: “...adopting an American-Israeli narrative claiming that victory had been achieved and reducing what remains of Hezbollah to a number of capabilities that Israel would take care of eliminating... [The authorities] effectively moved to help the enemy achieve what it had failed to accomplish through military force, through a malicious decision to treat the capital as though it were an entity separate from the rest of the country and to impose exceptional measures there whose sole purpose was to target the resistance fighters, under the same worn-out pretext: ‘extending state authority.’” [4]

In the newspaper’s narrative, the Lebanese authorities came to represent the “American occupation” and to act in Israel’s interests. Under the headline “The American Occupation Authority Justifies the Enemy’s Massacres,” it stated: “...This conspiratorial course reached a dangerous peak when the authorities offered yet another gift to the occupation, whose leaders made no secret of their satisfaction with what was called the ‘initiative to consider Beirut demilitarized.’” [5]

4- [Al-Akhbar newspaper, 10 April 2026](#)

5- [ibid](#)

Maytham Rizk also wrote an article in Al-Akhbar entitled “The Occupation Authority: Present in the Picture... Absent from Decision-Making,” referring to the Lebanese authorities. The article was accompanied by images of demonstrators holding signs reading: “Israel is the root cause of this country’s suffering, not the resistance.” Another sign featured images of Presidents Aoun and Salam with the words: “Partners with the enemy in aggression and bloodshed.”

These positions advanced by Hezbollah and its supporters were met with opposing narratives supportive of the President of the Republic. These praised the President’s positions as historic, portraying them as an embodiment of national sovereignty and as holding out the prospect of the state reclaiming its independent decision-making authority and freeing itself from foreign tutelage. They also stressed the need to accelerate the disarmament of Hezbollah so that Lebanon could move toward peace. This discourse was accompanied by hashtags supporting President Aoun, such as “President of Salvation,” as well as others supporting Prime Minister Salam, including “We are all with you; we are all for Lebanon.”

2. The Absent Judiciary

The Lebanese judiciary suffers from a troubled public image due to recurring accusations directed against it, including allegations of subordination to political authority and its failure to play an effective role in two major events that profoundly affected the Lebanese state. The first was the 2020 Beirut Port explosion, which destroyed the port and part of the capital; the second was the financial crisis that struck Lebanon beginning in 2019, causing Lebanese citizens to lose their savings and leaving the state insolvent and unable to service its debt.

The draft general amnesty law examined by parliamentary committees represented another blow to the judiciary, which appeared absent and marginalized from an issue that primarily falls within its own sphere of responsibility. Serious accusations were levelled against the judiciary in this context, without any response from either the judicial or governmental authorities. These included allegations that judicial rulings had relied on “fabricated charges” to detain certain individuals, accusations that the military judiciary was “biased and unjust,” [6] and challenges to the military court judge and his previous rulings. [7]

The proposed general amnesty appeared to amount to a form of sectarian political bargaining, driven by populist considerations aimed at winning public approval. The proposal became a platform through which its advocates sought to secure a “victory” for their respective sectarian communities, at the expense of a judiciary that appeared marginalized or absent and of existing laws that would effectively be bypassed, potentially allowing perpetrators of crimes to escape punishment. The stated grounds for the proposal also raised questions about the mechanisms used to deal with convicted prisoners and detainees, both in terms of prison conditions and the detention of individuals for years without trial. Such practices are incompatible with the most basic principles of public administration and the proper handling of judicial and humanitarian matters.

6- Mufti of Rashaya Sheikh Wafiq Hijazi, Al-Liwaa, “Friday Preachers Praised Mufti Derian’s Positions on the Adoption of the General Amnesty Law,” 9 May 2026

7- Nidaa Al-Watan, Saleh Machnouk, “Amnesty for a Crime That Was Never Committed,” 12 May 2026

The Mufti of Rashaya, Sheikh Wafiq Hijazi, accused the military judiciary of being “biased and unjust,” stating that: “Under a security regime, charges were fabricated against individuals and cases were manufactured in order to have them arrested. Clear evidence has established that they are innocent, yet some continue to portray the opposite as true. Had the law been properly applied and justice achieved, it would have been the jailer who was in prison...” [8]

Another account stated: “...As for the trial, this is where the major scandal lies. The trial was presided over by a brigadier general named Munir Shehadeh. If any citizen were to listen to the retired brigadier general’s views on Lebanese television, they could automatically not only invalidate the entire trial but return it to square one, to the point where he himself should be standing trial alongside al-Assir [Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir]. Naturally, the trial did not investigate a single Hezbollah member among those whose participation in the Abra clashes was documented in audio and video, not even as eyewitnesses to the events... This [amnesty] is a right, not an amnesty, because that crime, as it was narrated and prosecuted, was never committed in the first place.” [9]

Against this backdrop, concerns were raised that: “What is being proposed does not appear to be merely a humanitarian response to prison overcrowding or delayed trials. Rather, it raises serious concerns that amnesty could become a political instrument for entrenching impunity, violating the principle of separation of powers by circumventing the judiciary, and denying victims their rights. [...] The most dangerous consequence of this law may be to undermine Lebanese citizens’ confidence in the future. A victim who has waited years for a judicial ruling; the family of a soldier or civilian who was killed, abducted, or assaulted; or families devastated by drug traffickers will feel that justice has been abolished by a political decision... if amnesty is transformed from a limited and restricted constitutional exception into a recurring instrument for erasing crimes and obstructing accountability. In states where the authority of justice collapses, amnesty becomes a gateway to renewed violence and breakdown.” [10]

8- Al-Liwaa. “Friday Preachers Praised Mufti Derian’s Positions on the Adoption of the General Amnesty Law.” 9 May 2026.

9- Saleh Machnouk. Nidaa Al-Watan. “Amnesty for a Crime That Was Never Committed.” 12 May 2026.

Professor Tony Atallah. Al-Joumhouria. “General Amnesty in an Era of Restoring the State: Legislation for Impunity or 10- Exceptional Justice?” 11 May 2026.

The situation is further complicated by structural shortcomings within Lebanon's judicial system: "The matter becomes even more complex given the shortcomings of Lebanon's judicial system, where the extent of delays in hearings, stalled trials, accumulated case files, the continuous transfer of cases between judges, and the absence of definitive judicial decisions are no longer hidden. This crisis is not merely technical; it is also political and institutional, having accumulated as a result of political interference and the legacies of previous periods. [...] The problem therefore lies not only in the existence of detainees and prisoners, but also in the growing perception that justice is not applied equally. When this perception accumulates, it becomes more dangerous than the legal texts themselves because it creates a profound gap between citizens and the state. A citizen who loses confidence in the judiciary also loses confidence in the very idea of the state." [11]

The accusations directed at the judiciary, including allegations of bias within the military judiciary and weakness within the civilian judiciary, are recurring claims that risk undermining the authority and standing of the state and its ability to manage public affairs. These accusations continue to circulate without any meaningful response from either the authorities or the judiciary in defence of an institution that constitutes a fundamental pillar of the state.

11- <https://shorturl.at/v4O8m>

3. The “subordination” of the security institutions

Security agencies play a central role in maintaining internal security and overall stability and are expected to inspire confidence among all citizens. However, an incident as seemingly minor as the summoning of a private electricity generator owner in the Saqiyat al-Janzir area of Beirut damaged the image of these institutions, developing into a national issue and a matter of public concern. It triggered a wide range of accusations concerning the security forces, their role, their institutional structure, and the way they are constituted.

As Samir Akoum wrote in Al-Liwaa newspaper: “The Saqiyat al-Janzir incident in Beirut was not merely a local dispute over electricity generator pricing; rather, it was a revealing moment in which the structure of the Lebanese state was laid bare. On the surface, it was a dispute over services between residents and a security agency, but beneath it lay a much deeper crisis... What happened raises a fundamental question once again: What is the actual role of each security agency?” [12]

The article sets out a series of accusations against the security institutions: “When access to senior ranks becomes subject to quota-sharing rather than competence, the institution loses its spirit. Stories circulate of officers being appointed to sensitive positions despite not having even completed staff courses, while qualified individuals are excluded. [...] When implementing regulations are absent, security agencies become vulnerable to politicization. This is reflected in the enforcement of certain decisions while others are selectively disregarded, in the refusal to implement decisions issued by the executive authority, and even in the honoring of those who violate them... This perception does not remain confined to the legal sphere; it develops into social and sectarian resentment—a ticking time bomb threatening what remains of the unity of the state at the first spark, such as that of Saqiyat al-Janzir. Security that is not just cannot be stable... The Saqiyat al-Janzir incident should therefore not be viewed as a passing dispute, but as a warning...”

12- Dr. Samir Hassan Akoum. “Why Does Ensuring Beirut’s Security and Lebanon’s Sovereignty Require the Adoption of Implementing Laws to Clarify the Specific Mandates of the Security and Military Agencies?” Al-Liwaa. 27 April 2026.

These serious accusations against the security institutions, like those directed at the judiciary, were neither addressed nor denied by the relevant authorities. Despite its relatively minor nature, the incident nearly triggered unrest in the streets and became associated with the “dignity of a sect and the dignity of Beirut.” This illustrates not only the fragility of public confidence in state institutions but also the degree of tension prevailing in society and the ease with which sectarian sentiments can be mobilized, potentially generating significant risks.

The incident also demonstrates that the memory of war remains ever-present and that even a relatively minor event can return different actors to that memory and revive the ghosts of the past. Some may seek to explain the incident from a legal perspective. In practice, however, when civil peace itself becomes threatened, the legal dimension becomes secondary—particularly when the law is supposed to apply equally to everyone, rather than leaving some groups with the perception that they are subject to the law while others remain beyond legal accountability.

II. The Future of the Nation



Day after day, the ongoing war and the positions surrounding it deepened the internal divide between Hezbollah's supporters, who regard it as a resistance movement confronting the Israeli enemy, and those who hold it responsible for the war by drawing Israel into it. Hezbollah and its supporters portray themselves as the "national camp" confronting the enemy and making major sacrifices in blood and lives, while viewing the opposing camp as subservient to the enemy and as advocating a form of surrender that threatens the country and its institutions. Hezbollah's opponents, by contrast, see it as having become an Iranian faction serving foreign powers and sacrificing the country, its youth, and its overall stability in a war that serves Iran's interests. The two sides appeared fundamentally opposed, with little bringing them together. Each has its own cause, vision, and political project.

Media outlets supportive of Hezbollah continued to criticize the government of Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, which stripped Hezbollah of its status as a "resistance" movement and considered it to be operating outside state legitimacy. Hezbollah-aligned discourse, in turn, described it as a "Vichy government", a comparison with the French government during the Second World War that collaborated with Nazi Germany while France was under occupation, and described some of Hezbollah's opponents as representing "Lebanese Zionism." Both accusations carry serious implications and contribute to inflaming internal conflict. At the same time, numerous positions expressed by Hezbollah's opponents suggested that coexistence with the group had become increasingly difficult and questioned whether Lebanon could continue in its current form or under its existing political system.

References to a national "divorce" and to a separation that could lead to another internal war became increasingly common. Both sides also began raising the question of what would happen "the day after" the war with Israel ends, a question likewise raised by numerous journalists and intellectuals given the profound divide between the two competing political projects.

The question was therefore repeatedly posed: Where is Lebanon heading, and what will the day after the war look like?

1. Fear of the Other

The different actors' media discourse relied on the politics of fear to promote their respective positions, particularly by portraying the "other" as a direct threat that must be confronted, along with the political project it represents. Fear-based discourse serves several purposes for parties to a conflict: it helps mobilize supporters, consolidate ranks, justify hostile rhetoric, and legitimize violent reactions. At the same time, however, it has far-reaching consequences, making engagement with the other difficult, and perhaps impossible, by portraying that other as a source of danger. It reinforces the idea that the other is synonymous with the enemy and must therefore be confronted.

One example is Hezbollah's description of the opposing camp as "Zionist," effectively placing it in the same category as the enemy, particularly as Hezbollah increasingly portrays domestic actors as enemies conspiring against it. Conversely, Hezbollah's opponents view the group as posing a threat comparable to that of an external enemy, undermining coexistence and the possibility of building a shared life, while advancing a project they consider incompatible with the concept of the Lebanese state and the values of Lebanese society. Some domestic actors have gone as far as labeling Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

This recurring discourse of fear found a concrete manifestation in reactions to a proposed shelter for displaced people in the Karantina area at Beirut's northern entrance. The Disaster Risk Management Unit decided to establish the center to accommodate people displaced from southern Lebanon, a predominantly Shiite population generally perceived as part of Hezbollah's social constituency. The proposal was met with a strong opposition campaign that took on national dimensions. It would not be an exaggeration to say that much of the opposing discourse evoked the atmosphere and rhetoric of the Lebanese Civil War.

Nida al-Watan ran the following headline prominently across the top of its front page: “The Karantina Camp... A Cover for Tightening the Grip on Beirut.” [13] The article stated: “Is Hezbollah moving toward reasserting its control internally to compensate for any external loss? And what are the risks of establishing a camp for displaced people in Karantina, close to the Port of Beirut? Linking the two developments is not a political assumption but a realistic reading of a trajectory that is gradually taking shape and may carry serious risks for the capital and the state... There are major concerns that sheltering the displaced could be used as an indirect means of encircling Beirut from its maritime flank and, at a later stage, cutting off its connections with Metn and Keserwan, particularly if the internal situation deteriorates...”

Members of Parliament, politicians, media figures, and citizens participated in the campaign opposing the project. They rejected the opening of the center and expressed fears regarding the accommodation of displaced people there, arguing that their presence could threaten the security of the area and invoking memories and images of the Civil War. [14]

While the proposed project highlighted the existence of a profound national divide among the country’s different communities, it also revealed a lack of confidence in the political authorities overseeing it. Many invoked the 1975 Civil War and recalled the battles surrounding the Palestinian camps in Karantina and Tel al-Zaatar. This reflected fear of the other, apprehension about coexistence, and a lack of mutual trust, while also suggesting an absence of confidence in the existence of a political authority capable of safeguarding civil peace.

13- Nakhle Odaymi. “The Karantina Camp... A Cover for Tightening the Grip on Beirut!” Nidaa Al-Watan. Monday, 23 March 2026.

14- May Chidiac: “Establishing a Shelter Center for Displaced Persons Near the Port of Beirut by an Arbitrary Decision Will Not Pass.” National News Agency.

Elements of fear-based discourse used in relation to this issue included:

- Recalling the Civil War;
- Recalling how refugee camps became confrontation lines;
- Threats and intimidation;
- Portraying the project as a conspiracy to encircle Christian areas;
- Depicting the project as creating a new security hotspot.

This type of discourse contributes to deepening the divide among the country's different communities and confirms the loss of trust in the "other," who has become a source of fear and anxiety. The image of the nation has thus become one of communities that fear one another, while the image of the authorities has faded, as they appear unable to inspire citizens' confidence in either their capacity to protect them or to guarantee their security. It also became clear that the memory of war remains ever-present in the collective consciousness of Lebanese society.

This highly charged atmosphere prompted the authorities to step back from the project. The Disaster Risk Management Unit at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers issued the following clarification: "Contrary to circulating reports, the Disaster Risk Management Unit at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers confirms that all claims concerning the site being prepared in Karantina are unfounded. The Unit clarifies that the site is being prepared as a precautionary measure and is not intended for immediate use, noting that its intended purpose has not yet been determined..."

2. The Struggle over Identity

The war, the narratives surrounding it, and the positions of the different actors reflected divergent visions of the Lebanese entity, the meaning of the nation, and its future. Each side advances a political project that differs from that of the other and sees little possibility of convergence between them, to the point that disagreement with the “other” within the country is sometimes perceived as more dangerous than the conflict with the external enemy.

Articles and public positions increasingly questioned Lebanon’s ability to continue in its current form in light of the profound internal divisions. Alternative options for a new political system began to be raised, alongside questions about the ability of the Lebanese people to rebuild a unified nation given the numerous obstacles and challenges they face. Such propositions further heighten Lebanese citizens’ anxiety and fear about the future and what it may hold.

Under the headline **“Lebanon in the Eye of the Storm: Sovereignty between Subjugation and Resistance,”** Karim Haddad wrote: “...At moments of major transformation, words cease to be merely descriptions of reality and become part of the battle itself. What we are experiencing in Lebanon today is neither a passing state of uncertainty nor a conventional political crisis that can be contained through compromise or by smoothing over differences. Rather, we are facing a landscape in which conflict has reached its most intense point: a struggle over the very meaning of the country, its position, and its future... The question is no longer: Is there an aggression? Rather, how do we interpret this aggression? And do we have the courage to call things by their names? [...] What is intended for Lebanon is not merely military subjugation, but a comprehensive reshaping of its role and function in the region. At the heart of this landscape, the internal division emerges as more dangerous than any external threat.” [15]

15- Karim Haddad. “Lebanon in the Eye of the Storm: Sovereignty Between Subjugation and Resistance.” Al-Akhbar. Saturday, 28 March 2026.

Under the headline **“It Is Time to Think of a Different Lebanon,”** Ali Hamadeh wrote: “...Citizens do not feel that the state or the security and military institutions are acting with sufficient firmness to deter provocations and restore a sense of security in the neighborhoods and streets of the capital. This reality weighs heavily on the country. It will also shape the views of millions of Lebanese from other communities who reject everything represented by the aforementioned party [Hezbollah]—its politics, security practices, culture, and way of life. After the war, a serious and profound discussion will begin about the future of living together under one roof. Hezbollah’s project, which we expect will remain in place and active after the war, must be examined in light of the national project and Lebanon’s future. Lebanon’s unity under the current formula must be placed on the table for calm discussion, based on the premise that coexistence with this project—which poses a danger to all Lebanese—is no longer possible, not even with a moderated version of it. [...] It is time to think of a different Lebanon.” [16]

Some went further, questioning whether the Lebanese had ever constituted a unified people since the creation of the state. Under the headline **“Crime Brought Us Together,”** Dr. Qusay al-Hussein wrote: “We do not need extensive proof, nor do we lack evidence and indications, that the Lebanese have been divided since the earliest days of independence. We may not be greatly exaggerating if we say that this had already been the case under Ottoman rule and throughout the French Mandate. At no point did they form a single nation, nor were they ever one people, even when they belonged to the same religion or the same sect...” [17]

¹⁶- An-Nahar. 2 April 2026.

¹⁷- Al-Liwaa. 2 April 2026.

Others went as far as declaring the death of Lebanon in its current form, arguing that the developments underway represented the manifestation of the failure of the Lebanese state. Under the headline **“Lebanon between Ideology... State Failure and the Federalism Option,”** retired Brigadier General Tony Abi Samra wrote: “Lebanon today stands at a decisive historical moment that goes beyond a passing political crisis and has become an existential crisis in every sense of the word. What the country is experiencing is no longer merely a failure of governance or temporary disagreements among political forces; it has developed into a structural crisis striking at the foundations of the entity itself... The disagreement is no longer a conventional political dispute over power or interests. It has become a conflict of competing accounts, identities, and contradictory narratives, and even a religious and ideological conflict... Each side becomes convinced that it is defending not merely an interest, but a ‘divine right,’ thereby undermining the logic of compromise and transforming politics into an open confrontation... Since its establishment in 1936, the Lebanese system was designed to manage pluralism, but over time it has failed to achieve this objective... Each community has come to possess its own narrative, its own heroes, and its own interpretation of history. As a result, there is no longer an effective common framework capable of organizing this diversity.”

He further wrote, under the heading “The Illusion of Lebanese Nationalism”: “For decades, ‘Lebanese nationalism’ was presented as a solution capable of transcending sectarianism and divisions. Yet, nearly a century later, it has become clear that this project has never truly materialized. There is no unified history textbook agreed upon by all, no shared definition of friend and enemy, and no national symbols that unite all Lebanese... In this context, federalism emerges as a structural option—not as a proposal for partition, but as a mechanism for organizing and managing pluralism... The question today is no longer: How can we reform the current system? Rather, it has become: Is this system fundamentally capable of reform?” [18]

¹⁸- Nidaa Al-Watan, 1 April 2026.

Some went as far as suggesting the demise of Lebanon in its current form. Writing for Ici Beyrouth under the headline **“The End of Greater Lebanon?”**, Marc Saikali stated: “The countdown has begun, and Hezbollah is the one that set it in motion. One hundred and six years ago, France, as the Mandatory Power, proclaimed the establishment of ‘Greater Lebanon.’ A state born of a geographic and sectarian compromise, inherently fragile yet genuine in its ambition. Today, this state is being carved up while still alive...”

The prevailing national division over Lebanon’s future, combined with the grave developments the country is experiencing, does not point toward domestic stability, particularly in the absence of common ground between the two sides of the internal conflict. More concerning is the growing conviction among different actors that the existing national divide has become too profound to be easily addressed. As a result, conclusions and positions have emerged on both sides of the divide calling for recognition that Lebanon, in its current form, has effectively reached its limits.

Michel Tawk wrote in Nida al-Watan: “...There is an urgent need to consider a new political formula that moves beyond the current model, which has exhausted the Lebanese and brought them to collapse. Such a formula should acknowledge existing differences rather than attempt to conceal them and should give each community space to manage its local affairs in accordance with its cultural and social specificities, within a single state that retains exclusive control over weapons, foreign relations, and financial and sovereign policies. The time has come to acknowledge that sectarianism is not a superficial or temporary phenomenon in Lebanon, but rather an integral part of the country’s existing social and political structure...” [19]

Ibrahim al-Amin concluded: “What matters is that all of us, each from our own position, recognize that major changes have already taken place, that even greater changes are on the way, and that the Lebanon we know will not remain as it is, whether its people want this or reject it... This is the only truth in a world of Lebanese illusions!” [20]

19- Michel Touq. “From Coexistence to Shared Division.” *Nidaa Al-Watan*. 5 June 2026.
20- Al-Akhbar. 15 April 2026.

3. The Battle of Narratives and the Writing of History

War is not fought solely on military fronts and behind barricades; it is also a battle of narratives waged through media and social media, which support and provide coverage of military activities. In this sense, the narrative constitutes a parallel front to the military battlefield. It disseminates the doctrine for which the war is being fought and provides meaning and justification for the deaths of those who are subsequently portrayed as martyrs to the cause. Narratives also serve to explain the principles and values in whose name wars are fought, as expressed through the speeches of leaders, supportive media coverage, and the interventions of journalists and influencers.

Narratives provide an account of historical events as they unfold, which can later contribute to the construction of collective memory and the writing of the history of communities and nations. Each side presents the facts and arguments that support its own narrative, which may subsequently serve as a reference for future researchers, documentarians, and archivists.

Among the narratives observed during the report period, two were selected to illustrate the profound divergence in perspectives, perceptions of present realities and the future, and interpretations of the same event from different—and even contradictory—angles. The first concerns the direct negotiations that the Lebanese authorities decided to conduct with Israel under U.S. auspices, framed through the competing narratives of **peace versus surrender**. The second concerns the outcome of the war between Hezbollah and Israel, framed through the competing narratives of **victory versus defeat**.

The Negotiations Narrative

President Joseph Aoun's address to the Lebanese people on 17 April 2026 concerning direct negotiations with Israel under U.S. auspices had a significant impact, reflected in the large number of reactions it generated. The majority of political forces, media figures, and opinion leaders in Lebanese society commented on the speech. Their positions largely divided into two opposing camps: the first supported the President's address, viewing it as an assertion of sovereign decision-making and an initiative aimed at achieving the peace sought by the Lebanese people; the second regarded it as an act of surrender to the enemy and a betrayal of the blood of the resistance's martyrs.

President Aoun stated in his address: "Negotiations do not mean, and will never mean, relinquishing any right, abandoning any principle, or compromising the sovereignty of this nation... I am prepared to assume full responsibility for these choices, and I am prepared to go wherever necessary to liberate my land, protect my people, and save my country. My mission is singular, clear, and specific: to save this country and its people... Our objective is clear and publicly declared: to end the Israeli aggression against our land and our people; secure the Israeli withdrawal; extend the authority of the state over its entire territory exclusively through its own forces; ensure the return of the prisoners; and enable our people to return to their homes and villages in security, freedom, and dignity..."

The President's address was regarded as a pivotal moment in Lebanese political life, as it opened the question of direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel with the aim of reaching a peace agreement and ending the state of war that has existed between the two countries since the establishment of the State of Israel.

However, direct negotiations do not command consensus among Lebanese political actors. Hezbollah and its supporters appear strongly opposed to them, accusing their proponents of betrayal, of disregarding the blood of the martyrs, and of threatening civil peace by unilaterally adopting such a position. Hezbollah's opponents, by contrast, praised the initiative and commended the President of the Republic for his courage.

In a statement, Hezbollah’s parliamentary bloc said: “The authorities have brought Lebanon into a new and highly dangerous phase that threatens its very existence, territorial integrity, the safety of its people, its internal cohesion, and its national unity,” accusing them of “submitting to American dictates and opting for direct negotiations with the Zionist enemy, contrary to the national will.” [21]

Ibrahim al-Amin wrote in Al-Akhbar: “If President Joseph Aoun believes that the ‘American formula for a ceasefire’ will grant him the legitimacy to enter into direct negotiations with the enemy while offering further concessions, this means that he and those around him have failed to understand the lesson of ‘devoured straw’ [al-‘asf al-ma’kūl]. [22] It is a lesson that others must also absorb, particularly Prime Minister Nawaf Salam and a large number of ministers alongside him...” [23]

The language used in reactions to the President’s proposal for direct negotiations with Israel was heavily charged with violent and negative rhetoric on both sides. Expressions used included “political suicide,” “assassination,” “existential threat,” “threatening civil peace,” “bringing down the government,” and “partition in response to weapons.”

Supporters of the “resistance” viewed the negotiations as a threat to the resistance, a betrayal of its role and its martyrs, and explored ways of pressuring the President to abandon his initiative. Among the positions condemning the negotiations as serving the enemy was that of Mahmoud Qamati: “If the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister insist on pursuing the path of direct negotiations, then they are on one path and we are on another... After the victory that will come later, the state will face two choices: either apologize to the people and reverse its decisions against Hezbollah, or face peaceful popular anger that could lead to its downfall... The President of the Republic thanked the killer and the criminal, but did not thank the party that saved us, which is Iran.”

Under the headline **“The Authority of Shame Kneels in Washington: No End to the War and Complicity in Lebanese Bloodshed,”** Al-Akhbar wrote: “The American-Israeli occupation authority in Lebanon has taken its dirtiest political step yet, openly betraying the people and the victims of the ongoing Israeli aggression, and going so far as to pose for a photograph of shame with representatives of the two criminal states. It did not stop there, but agreed to a statement in which it adopted the enemy’s position on the resistance and accepted the disarmament of the resistance as a condition for any ceasefire.” [24]

21- Saturday, 18 April 2026.

22- “The term ‘devoured straw’ carries multiple dimensions in which linguistic and religious meanings intersect with political and military symbolism. Linguistically, ‘asf’ refers to the leaves or straw of crops that dry out and crumble, while ‘ma’kul’ means that which has been eaten by animals or consumed and eroded. This Qur’anic expression appears in Surah Al-Fil to describe the fate of the People of the Elephant, whom God made ‘like devoured straw.’ In the religious context, the phrase refers to the story of Abraha the Abyssinian and his army, who came to destroy the Kaaba. God destroyed them through flocks of birds that pelted them with stones of baked clay, leaving them like devoured straw. It is therefore a Qur’anic metaphor for the ‘total defeat’ of invading forces.” An-Nahar, 11 March 2026.

23- Al-Akhbar, Saturday, 18 April 2026.

24- 15 April 2026.

2 “A Discourse of Peace”

Nida al-Watan devoted most of its front page to a photograph of the President of the Republic, in a clear demonstration of support for his position. Its headline read: **“Aoun in a Historic Address: We Have Reclaimed Lebanon and Are No Longer Anyone’s Battlefield.”** The newspaper wrote: “The President of the Republic’s address [...] provided a clear confirmation that Lebanon is moving forward on the path of negotiations that began several days ago in Washington.” On that occasion, the President stated: “We have reclaimed Lebanon and Lebanon’s decision-making authority, for the first time in nearly half a century. Today, we negotiate on our own behalf, and we decide for ourselves. We are no longer a card in anyone’s pocket, nor a battlefield for anyone else’s wars...” [25]

The newspaper also cited an official source as saying that Lebanon was proceeding with the negotiations and that nothing would stop this process. The form and level of negotiations could be determined by developments in the coming days, but what was certain was that the process was moving in the right direction and that there would be no turning back. [26]

Dr. Nadine al-Kahil also wrote: “The President of the Republic’s strong and courageous address marked a turning point at a sensitive and pivotal stage for Lebanon. We are now witnessing a gradual and accelerating process of transformation toward freeing Lebanon from the grip of foreign agendas and allegiances and returning to Lebanese national identity, by moving away from futile wars and toward the harbor of peace, stability, and prosperity... This address came to affirm to the skeptics and those making accusations of treason that ‘there is no allegiance except to Lebanon and its people’...”

The Al-Marsad Online website, meanwhile, reported that the President’s address: “received a highly positive response among broad segments of the Lebanese public from across the political and social spectrum, particularly among Christians. Many considered him the first President of the Republic in decades to demonstrate such a degree of courage, boldness, and determination to move forward with convictions that he believes serve Lebanon’s interests...”

Naufal Daou, for his part, compared the significance of President Joseph Aoun’s address to that of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s 1977 speech before the Egyptian People’s Assembly, in which Sadat declared his willingness to visit Israel and deliver a speech before the Knesset in pursuit of an honorable peace based on the liberation of Sinai.

25- Nidaa Al-Watan. 18 April 2026.

26- Nidaa Al-Watan. 18 April 2026.

The Narrative of the War in the South: Victory or Catastrophe?

Hezbollah's narratives and statements by its leaders portray the war in southern Lebanon as a victory over Israel. This position has been repeatedly articulated and directed toward different audiences: toward supporters, to bolster their resolve and reaffirm that they are on the right path; and toward opponents, to assert that Hezbollah has prevailed, will not be defeated, and that the weapons of the resistance have succeeded in confronting the enemy, meaning that the party should therefore be treated as a victorious force.

Extensive debate has taken place over the meaning of "victory." Hezbollah's opponents argue that the party was defeated, pointing to Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon, the destruction of villages, and the killing of Hezbollah leaders and thousands of its fighters. Hezbollah and its supporters, however, respond that the party succeeded in confronting Israel and continues to fight, which they consider in itself to constitute a victory.

1

The Narrative of Victory

The narrative of victory recurs frequently in statements by Hezbollah officials, particularly those of its Secretary-General, Naim Qassem, who maintains that the party has achieved victory despite all opposition and that the resistance fighters will continue to secure further victories. Hezbollah's official statements similarly reinforce this narrative: "Today, we stand on the threshold of a great historic victory, one that will be achieved thanks to the sacrifices of the resistance fighters, the blood of the martyrs, and your unparalleled steadfastness and patience... This treacherous and barbaric enemy, seeking to escape the image of its defeat, may resort to acts of treachery in an attempt to manufacture an illusory scene suggesting that it has achieved something it was unable to accomplish on the battlefield..."

Pierre Abi Saab was among those supporting this narrative: "No one can defeat these resistance fighters. No matter how much Washington's clowns, the 'Saturday slaves' in Lebanon, try to lend a hand to the defeated army of barbarians... their disappointment will be immense, and they will be left with nothing but the bitterness of betrayal... No negotiations, no surrender!"

Faysal Abdel Sater similarly stated: "A legendary resistance that thwarted all the objectives of the Israeli enemy. Thank you to Hezbollah and its great leadership; thank you to the Amal Movement and to every free and honorable person in Lebanon who contributed to this great victory..."

The Narrative of Catastrophe

Particularly striking was the front-page headline published by L'Orient-Le Jour on 21 April: "The Nakba of Southern Lebanon," accompanied by a photograph of the town of Mays al-Jabal showing an Israeli flag raised over one of its houses. The use of the term Nakba was especially significant because it is traditionally associated with the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948, when more than 700,000 Palestinians were displaced from their land and more than 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed by the Zionist movement in the process leading to the establishment of the State of Israel.

Ibrahim Haidar also used the term Nakba in an article entitled "**The Loss of the South... Catastrophe Beyond the 'Great Victory'?**": "It is no longer possible to downplay the magnitude of the losses caused by the war launched in support of Iran, or to minimize the catastrophe that has befallen southern Lebanon and the country as a whole. The Israeli occupation is destroying villages, razing homes to the ground, extinguishing life within them, and tampering with their history, heritage, and culture by altering their landmarks and turning them into scorched earth... The catastrophic consequences cannot be minimized or embellished, nor can one speak of victories in light of the displacement and destruction inflicted upon the community and the country. What the party faces today, despite its fighters' confrontation with the occupation, is not merely a setback but something approaching a defeat—one that has inflicted devastating losses on its structure, entrenched the occupation of 55 southern villages, and perpetuated the violation of Lebanon's sovereignty..." [27]



Charles Jabbour stated: "A word to those promoting the idea of 'victory': not only have they been defeated—as demonstrated by the depth to which Israel has advanced inside Lebanon—but they also bear responsibility for all the death, destruction, and displacement that has occurred since they declared war on 8 October 2023, and they must be held accountable. Their rhetoric is merely further evidence of how detached they are from reality."

Naufal Daou wrote: "Had Hezbollah's supporters read the official statement of the ceasefire agreement and examined its contents, they would not have fired shots into the air in celebration... They might instead have shot themselves in suicide! The agreement clearly sets out their defeat and reflects the collapse of all their slogans, narratives, and illusions... and brings the role of their weapons to an end in clear and direct terms!"

Diana Moukalled wrote: "We had five occupied points... now we have 55 occupied villages, and Israel has the right to intervene whenever it wishes, according to the published agreement... The 'era of victories' in all its splendor..."

The two narratives stand directly opposed to one another. Each has its own promoters—politicians, journalists, media outlets, platforms, social media accounts, and supporters—who embrace and disseminate it while seeking to discredit the opposing narrative.

Supporters of the catastrophe narrative accuse Hezbollah of sacrificing Lebanon's interests, of subordination to Iran, and of waging a war that did not originate from a Lebanese decision.

Conversely, supporters of the victory narrative accuse their opponents of subservience, betrayal, and positioning themselves within the American-Israeli camp. Here too, the discourse portrays its opponents as deliberately turning a blind eye to Hezbollah's resistance, which, according to this narrative, confronts the Israeli enemy, prevents it from achieving its objectives, and pays a "price in blood."

How, then, can a single event—visible to all and experienced collectively by the same society—produce such fundamentally contradictory perceptions and interpretations of its manifestations and consequences within that society? This question gives rise to others: What risks do these competing narratives pose at the national level and to social cohesion? Does society's division over this particular issue reflect deeper divisions within it? And which narrative will historians ultimately adopt in the years to come?

III. The War in Media

Coverage



الضاحية بعد الهدنة:
عودة بلا استقرار

الضاحية بعد الهدنة:
عودة بلا استقرار

الضاحية بعد الهدنة:
عودة بلا استقرار

نساء في مخيمات

سحمر تتشارك مع جنوب لبنان في النكبة
رغم بعدها الجغرافي عن خطوط المواجهة

لوسيان بارساكيان

في بلدة سحمر، جنوب لبنان، تعيش نساء من النكبة، رغم بعدها الجغرافي عن خطوط المواجهة. هذه النساء، اللواتي هجرن من فلسطين عام 1948، كنّ جزءاً من النكبة، رغم بعدها الجغرافي عن خطوط المواجهة. هذه النساء، اللواتي هجرن من فلسطين عام 1948، كنّ جزءاً من النكبة، رغم بعدها الجغرافي عن خطوط المواجهة.

سحمر تتشارك مع جنوب لبنان في النكبة
رغم بعدها الجغرافي عن خطوط المواجهة

التيار

مشروع اتفاق «خطوة بخطوة»

مشروع اتفاق «خطوة بخطوة»

مشروع اتفاق «خطوة بخطوة»

الخبر

الخبر

الخبر

1. Discourse of Treason and Violence

Against the backdrop of the government's positions toward Hezbollah, its characterization of the group's weapons as being outside the law, and the authorities' subsequent initiation of direct dialogue with Israel, a fierce war of words erupted between the two sides. Media outlets supportive of each camp, social media platforms, and influencers joined this confrontation. At the heart of the discourse were mutual accusations of treason.

Hezbollah repeatedly accused Nawaf Salam's government of treason, describing it as a "Vichy government," while also characterizing its opponents as representing "Lebanese Zionism." It portrayed resistance to Israel as the only solution to the ongoing war, while simultaneously presenting itself as the victim of a conspiracy involving both the authorities and its domestic opponents. Hezbollah's opponents, meanwhile, continued to accuse the group of having drawn Israel into invading Lebanon and portrayed its political and social project as a threat to the country, describing Hezbollah as a faction of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Beyond mutual accusations of treason, this clash of narratives contained significant elements of incitement, threats, and violence.

Newspapers and other media and communication platforms aligned with both sides participated in this campaign. Al-Akhbar accused the Prime Minister of acting "as though he wanted Israel's war on Lebanon to continue." It also accused the President of the Republic of "offering free gifts" to the enemy and criticized him for using the term "victims," rather than "martyrs," when referring to those killed in the war. Nida al-Watan, meanwhile, drew a parallel between "Israel's bloodshed and Hezbollah's treachery" and accused Hezbollah of providing Israel with pretexts to wage war against Lebanon. These two newspapers effectively served as leading voices for their respective camps. Television channels and social media platforms aligned with both sides largely followed the same trajectory.

Discourse of Treason

Who is betraying the nation? Two competing narratives confront one another. Hezbollah's narrative accuses the Lebanese authorities of treason and of conspiring against both the group and the country. The counter-narrative advanced by Hezbollah's opponents revisits the group's history and foreign political affiliations and holds it fully responsible for the war and the resulting defeat. At times, this discourse of treason resorted to derogatory language to describe opponents, including terms such as "rabble," "barbarians," "mercenaries," "traitors," and "conspirators," among other forms of violent rhetoric characteristic of the language of war.

Accusing the Authorities of Treason

In Hezbollah-aligned discourse, the Lebanese government came to be described as the "authority of shame" and the "American-Israeli occupation authority"—labels that convey the most serious accusations of treason. Under the headline "The Authority of Shame Kneels in Washington: No End to the War and Complicity in Lebanese Bloodshed," Al-Akhbar wrote: "The American-Israeli occupation authority in Lebanon has taken its dirtiest political step yet, openly betraying the people and the victims of the ongoing Israeli aggression, and going so far as to pose for a photograph of shame with representatives of the two criminal states. It did not stop there, but agreed to a statement in which it adopted the enemy's position on the resistance and accepted the disarmament of the resistance as a condition for any ceasefire." [28]

Hezbollah and its supporters also accused the authorities of treason, of disregarding the blood of the martyrs, and of threatening civil peace.

Under the headline "The American Occupation Authority Justifies the Enemy's Massacres," Al-Akhbar stated: "...This conspiratorial course reached a dangerous peak when the authorities offered yet another gift to the occupation, whose leaders made no secret of their satisfaction with what was called the 'initiative to consider Beirut demilitarized.'" The article noted that this decision had been adopted by the government during a session chaired by the President of the Republic.

Under the headline “The Vichy Government Goes Further in Its Betrayal: A Letter to the United Nations Providing Cover for the Aggression against Lebanon,” Marwan Abu Haidar wrote in Al-Akhbar: “At a time when the enemy’s explicit threats against Lebanon are escalating and plans are being proposed to alter the situation along the border by force—particularly following Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz’s declaration that ‘all houses facing the border’ would be destroyed and that Israel would ‘change the reality on our border with Lebanon once and for all’—those in power in Lebanon are preoccupied with establishing the illegality of any resistance to the occupation. Informed sources revealed that the Lebanese government sent a letter to the Security Council on 3 March classifying ‘Hezbollah’s military wing’ as being outside the law. Two days ago, Lebanon’s mission to the United Nations reiterated this position before the Security Council, while Prime Minister Nawaf Salam instructed Lebanon’s representative to the United Nations, Ahmad Arafa, to present the letter to the Security Council.”

According to the article, the letter included the provisions of the Council of Ministers’ decision concerning Hezbollah, as follows:

- The immediate prohibition of all Hezbollah military and security activities and their designation as unlawful;
- Requiring Hezbollah to surrender its weapons to the Lebanese state;
- Restricting Hezbollah’s activities to the political sphere within constitutional and legal frameworks;
- Instructing the military and security agencies to take immediate measures to prevent any military operations or the launching of rockets or drones from Lebanese territory, and to arrest those responsible for violations.

The newspaper added: “...The matter is far more serious than some may think. This development is not merely a procedural measure intended to formalize the decision; rather, it provides legal and political cover for any approach the Security Council may take. More seriously, the letter justifies Israeli attacks and the occupation, as the enemy will claim each time that it is fighting an outlawed entity on behalf of the Lebanese state, which has failed to disarm Hezbollah. It also provides cover for any massacres Israel may subsequently commit under the pretext of targeting the party’s infrastructure or assassinating its officials...” [29]

The newspaper therefore argued that: “‘Conspiracy’ may be the most accurate description of the Lebanese authorities’ conduct. It is a conspiracy that deliberately provokes in a manner that will inevitably lead to an explosion. At its core, it reflects the adoption of an American-Israeli narrative claiming victory and reducing what remains of Hezbollah to a number of capabilities that Israel will take responsibility for eliminating. What is happening today is unprecedented, and its objective is clear: to overturn all internal balances and place the country entirely under the control of the United States, paving the way for a transformation of its political identity...” [30]

These accusations were followed by the characterization of the opposing camp as “Zionist,” a label that effectively places those accused in the category of the enemy: “Lebanese Zionism is not a simple phenomenon that can be reduced to accusations or slogans. Rather, it is a complex intellectual-political structure that transcends religious affiliation or sectarian identity and is situated within a network of interests, discourses, and alignments that have historically developed in modern Lebanon. Understanding it therefore requires not passing judgments, but examining the conditions that make it possible: how does it emerge, why is it produced, and under what discourse is it legitimized? [...] In this sense, Zionism becomes a political function rather than a declared identity. It is a position within a structure of power, not a membership card... The problem is no longer the occupation, but the ‘reaction’ to it. The danger is no longer the aggression, but the resistance. [...] Lebanese Zionism, therefore, does not operate solely through political alliances, but also through the reproduction of language. It operates at the conceptual level: transforming ‘resistance’ into a ‘problem,’ ‘aggression’ into a ‘context,’ and ‘surrender’ into ‘realism.’ But why does Lebanese Zionism emerge in this form? The answer lies in Lebanon’s political structure itself: a weak state, a sectarian system, multiple foreign affiliations, and a constant fear of internal explosion...” [31]

Perhaps one of the most explicit examples of accusations of treason came from Hezbollah Political Council Deputy Chairman Mahmoud Qamati: “The Vichy government used to arrest resistance fighters and execute them. It was then overthrown, and its traitors were executed. God willing, we will not reach that point.”

30- “Negotiating Under Fire in Washington with Security Concessions Made in Advance.” Al-Akhbar. 10 April 2026.

31- “Lebanese Zionism.” Karim Haddad. Al-Akhbar. 2 April 2026.

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These are explicit and unequivocal public accusations of treason, accompanied by campaigns of incitement and overt threats.

The rhetoric went beyond the conventional boundaries of political discourse, extending to allusions to assassination similar to that of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, calls to confront decisions by the authorities through armed resistance comparable to that waged against the “South Lebanon Army” led by Antoine Lahad, and threats to bring down the government through street mobilization.

Accusing Hezbollah of Treason

Conversely, Hezbollah's opponents portray the organization as an Iranian faction that takes its orders from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and implements a foreign agenda. In this narrative, Hezbollah is prepared to confront, by any means, anyone who calls on it to surrender its weapons and submit fully to the authority of the Lebanese state.

Addressing Hezbollah, Saleh Nihad al-Machnouk wrote: "Tehran can burn so that Beirut may survive; this is the logic of any normal Lebanese person—except you. You are prepared to burn Beirut so that Tehran may survive... You are not even agents, because major powers protect their agents; you are mercenaries."

He added: "Do not think that any of you can lecture us under the pretext that Israel is prepared to act with brutality, because you made the decision knowing its consequences, and this blood is on your hands just as it is on Israel's. But at least Israel is fighting for its own people, unlike you, who are fighting in defense of the Khamenei regime's mercenaries!" [32]

In what also appeared to be a response to Hezbollah, Ziad Sami Itani wrote in Al-Liwaa: "In August of last year, after the Council of Ministers adopted a historic decision restricting weapons to the hands of the state, Secretary-General Naim Qassem's rhetoric escalated to levels unprecedented since the end of the Civil War in 1990. Qassem said: 'The decision is dangerous and exposes the country to a major crisis. Hezbollah will not surrender its weapons even if this leads to an all-out war.'"

Qassem also described any attempt to disarm Hezbollah as a **"Karbala-like war,"** declaring his readiness to **"cut off the hand that reaches"** for its weapons.

Itani continued: "In the Lebanese context, this was not metaphorical language. Hezbollah is effectively the only armed actor theoretically capable of triggering an internal war. [Prime Minister Nawaf] Salam immediately described this rhetoric as a 'veiled threat of civil war,' stressing that 'threatening or even alluding to civil war is entirely unacceptable.' In the same context, Qassem also said: 'The government bears full responsibility for any strife that may occur.' This sentence is a classic example of a threat framed through the denial of responsibility..."

32- Nizar Nimr. Al-Akhbar. 10 April 2026.

Itani identified four “crimes” in Hezbollah’s conduct:

- **“The first crime: Reversing the principle of sovereignty.** International law, the Lebanese Constitution, and the Taif Agreement all establish one principle: the state alone decides matters of war and peace. Hezbollah unilaterally decided to go to war and left the state to bear its consequences. Then, when the government demanded that it comply with the law, it described the law itself as an ‘American-Israeli project.’ This is not opposition; it is the systematic destruction of the very concept of the state.”
- **“The second crime: Holding Lebanon hostage to Iran.** Launching rockets ‘in solidarity with Iran’ following Khamenei’s death requires no analysis. The party decided to expose Lebanon and its people to attacks in the service of Tehran’s agenda. The government did not approve this, Parliament did not debate it, and the majority of Lebanese did not want it.”
- **“The third crime: Using the threat of civil war as a political instrument.** When the only armed party in the country threatens an ‘all-out war’ in response to the decisions of a legitimate government, this is not a warning. It is armed blackmail. The Lebanese people, who endured fifteen years of civil war, understand perfectly well what such threats mean.”
- **“The fourth crime: Betraying Shiite representation.** Lebanon’s Shiite community has suffered the most from the party’s wars: its towns have been destroyed, its young people killed, and its economy devastated. Yet the party then boycotts government sessions discussing assistance for displaced people—primarily its own displaced constituency—in the service of regional calculations far removed from the needs of the people of the south and the southern suburbs...” [33]

These are two opposing narratives, confronting one another and leading toward an inevitable confrontation.

Discourse of Violence

Lebanese actors appear to be directly engaged in the ongoing war in Lebanon and the wider region, placing their bets on its developments and exchanging threats. Some stand alongside the Lebanese authorities and support their choices, while others attack them and reject their role or legitimacy. This confrontation is taking place within a discourse marked by violence, threatening the breakdown of civil peace and a return to street confrontation, with potentially serious consequences for the country's future and internal stability.

Brigadier General George Nader warned against the escalation of inflammatory and sectarian rhetoric in Lebanese society: "There are two opposing currents: one based on accusations of treason and the other on exclusion. This climate could lead to further tensions and possibly internal confrontations if it is not quickly contained." [34]

The political landscape increasingly appears divided into two camps positioned in opposing trenches, raising the possibility of confrontation: "...We must sound the alarm over what the coming days may hold... Neither war nor peace. The negotiations resemble an endless farcical series... The authorities are now in one trench and the resistance in the opposing trench. This is the dangerous test. Who will save Lebanon from an explosion...?" [35]

Under the headline **"The Internal Battle Has Begun,"** Nakhle Odaime wrote: "The 'party' realizes that implementation of the agreement will gradually reduce its military and security influence and open the way for a political process that may ultimately lead to its disarmament and the restoration of the monopoly over armed force to legitimate state institutions. For this reason, the prospects of an internal political confrontation appear high, and the threatening statements of its Secretary-General, Naim Qassem, are the clearest evidence of this. Through his words, Qassem effectively proclaimed himself the supreme leader of the Lebanese, laying out a roadmap for the state that begins with ending what he described as the farce of futile, humiliating, and disgraceful negotiations, while vowing that the 'resistance' would continue..." [36]

34- Bel Arabi. 30 March 2026.

35- Nabih Al-Borji. "Who Will Save Lebanon from the Explosion?" Al-Diyar. 6 June 2026.

36- Nakhle Odaymi. "After the Historic Agreement... The Internal Battle Has Begun." Nidaa Al-Watan. 5 June 2026.

Some journalists and politicians also attached the label of “terrorism” to Hezbollah, while others revisited what they described as the “party’s history of assassinations, defiance of state authority, and threats against the judiciary,” among other accusations.

This included an investigative report broadcast by MTV concerning what the channel described as Hezbollah-run prisons located in the heart of the capital. The report identified their alleged locations on a map resembling the evacuation-warning maps published by Israel ahead of airstrikes. According to the channel’s report: “The state that actually governs Lebanon is the armed state [a reference to Hezbollah], which abducts, arrests, and imprisons, and whose investigations are subsequently relied upon by the judiciary.” Al-Akhbar, for its part, accused MTV of periodically publishing: “lists of Lebanese individuals whose views it does not support, thereby implicitly inciting their killing.”

The newspaper went further, accusing the channel of inciting the authorities to kill their opponents and of contributing to the risk of civil war: “MTV never ceases to pour the fuel of psychological warfare in support of the enemy onto the flames of its aggression against Lebanon, despite all its sophistry about opposing the war and opposing the ‘dragging of Lebanon into a war that is not its war.’”

It continued: “But the hypocritical channel is not opposed to war as a matter of principle. It is opposed only to fighting the occupying entity that places Lebanon squarely within its expansionist map. At the same time, it has no objection to fighting its own compatriots by accusing them of treason and inciting against them, even to the point of complaining about the authorities’ ‘failure’ to kill them and provoke a civil war—although the authorities have certainly not refrained from repressing them.” [37]

37- Al-Akhbar, 17 March 2026.

Nida al-Watan responded to the campaign targeting MTV: “It is hardly surprising that those who have thrived on the language of silencers, adopted political assassination as a method, and pledged complete allegiance to the ‘mullahs of Iran’ would unleash their mouthpieces of abuse and threats against Nida al-Watan and MTV. This intimidation is merely another chapter in the playbook of a terrorist school that trembles at every free voice rejecting the party and the authority of its weapons. Nor is it surprising that the Hezbollah “gang,” which did not hesitate to displace its own community and gamble with its fate without the slightest sense of responsibility, would show no regard for the lives and dignity of others. The ‘party,’ battered by its military, moral, and national defeats, is now attempting to ignite internal fires in order to conceal its setbacks behind the smoke, seeking an outlet for its deep-seated grievances and its historic hostility toward Lebanon and the state.” [38]

Writing in Nida al-Watan, Amjad Iskandar called for Hezbollah to be put on trial at both the national and international levels: “...There is a need for a special tribunal, both national and international, to hold the Hezbollah ‘gang’ accountable for what it has perpetrated against the nation. In political and moral terms, what is needed is a ‘Lebanese Nuremberg’ that delivers justice and restores to the Lebanese people some of their rights vis-à-vis those who escaped the consequences of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon concerning the assassination of Rafic Hariri and his companions. Perhaps one of the costliest mistakes of the previous period was the failure to adequately address the judgments of that tribunal. This became one of the avenues of leniency that brought us to the present catastrophe. As for theories about ‘accommodating Hezbollah,’ in reality they amounted to nothing more than prescriptions for prolonged failure, producing only further erosion of the state and greater control over its institutions...” [39] Charles Jabbour, meanwhile, described Hezbollah as a “machine of killing and terrorism.”

38- Nidaa Al-Watan, 17 March 2026.

39- 30 March 2026.

One particularly striking example of violent rhetoric in media discourse appeared on the second page of Al-Akhbar on 16 April 2026. A large banner at the top of the page read **“Do Not Reconcile,”** with the word **“No”** displayed prominently in red, with blood dripping from it against a black background. Beneath it, Ibrahim al-Amin published an editorial entitled **“Aoun and Salam: A Final Chance!”** Opponents of the diplomatic process also launched a fierce campaign characterized by a vocabulary of confrontation and violence. Expressions used included:

- “The agreement is a sin.” Aoun is promoting “imaginary heroics.” Yazid bin Farhan is acting as a “High Commissioner.” The agreement is a “document of shame.” [40]
- “The surrender agreement.” The “agreement of humiliation.” [41]
- “Aoun and Salam are more like adolescents than statesmen at critical moments.” [42]
- “The madness of Aoun and Salam.” [43]
- “What was presented to public opinion as a diplomatic achievement appeared more like a document of surrender by an authority selling the country’s rights to an occupation that continues to kill and destroy.” [44]
- The authorities “absolve the Israeli enemy of any responsibility; indeed, they seek to exonerate it and justify its actions.” [45]
- Aoun and Salam “bear responsibility for every drop of blood spilled in the increasingly tense streets, where the specter of internal strife is re-emerging...” [46]

40- Al-Akhbar. “The Resistance Announces Its Rejection of the ‘Document of Shame’.” 5 June 2026.

41- Al-Akhbar. “The ‘Surrender’ Agreement Up in the Air... How Will Aoun Hold the Enemy Responsible for Failing to Implement It?” 5 June 2026.

42- Al-Akhbar. 6 June 2026.

43- Al-Akhbar. “Aoun and Salam: Threatening the Lebanese and Iranians and Extending a Hand to Israel.”

44- Al-Akhbar. “The Resistance Announces Its Rejection of the ‘Document of Shame’.” 5 June 2026.

45- Al-Akhbar. “Berri Defused Washington’s Mine and Jumblatt Warned Against Repeating the Oslo Experience | Aoun and Salam: Threatening the Lebanese and Iranians and Extending a Hand to Israel.” 6 June 2026.

46- Al-Akhbar. 16 April 2026.

Media rhetoric escalated to the point of threats of physical elimination, calls for officials to be tried on charges of collaboration and treason, and appeals for street mobilization to bring down the diplomatic process. Such an atmosphere heightens the level of threatening rhetoric, undermines the proper functioning of political processes, and pushes the different actors to retreat further behind their respective barricades. The fellow citizen consequently becomes an adversary to be feared and confronted.

Inflammatory rhetoric also extended to the military institution through a suspicious statement attributed to “patriotic officers,” appearing to threaten fragmentation within a national institution that constitutes the country’s last line of defense. The language of hostility and rejection of the other even extended to displaced people who had been forced by Israel to leave their villages and homes. They, too, became subject to social discrimination while enduring displacement under already tragic circumstances.

2. Media Involvement in the War and the Boundaries of Freedom and Responsibility

The military battles taking place on the ground and the Israeli attacks affecting numerous areas were accompanied by an ongoing media war, in which media and social media platforms became instruments of the conflict. They employed media discourse loaded with all available forms of content and possible interpretations, both to influence the opposing side and to win public support by persuading audiences of the credibility of their respective positions. This raises the question of whether, in adopting such an approach, media outlets respected the ethical principles of the profession.

As events unfolded, divisions within political discourse deepened and mutual accusations intensified. Rhetoric of treason and incitement became part of everyday discourse, entering the vocabulary of media outlets and subsequently that of the public and social media users. This suggests that such rhetoric cannot simply be regarded as the result of unintended professional or ethical errors that media outlets occasionally fail to recognize. Rather, it constitutes deliberate discourse used as an instrument in the service of the political projects pursued by the different actors. Discourse that undermines confidence in the state and its institutions, casts doubt on the security forces, accuses public officials of treason and failure, and is accompanied by incitement, insults, and fearmongering toward an “other” who is no longer portrayed as a member of the same national community but as an adversary and source of danger runs counter to the standards, principles, and objectives of journalism and instead serves the interests of the parties engaged in the conflict.

Moreover, confrontational discourse is no longer confined to everyday contentious issues or disagreements over government policies. Nor is it restricted to low-quality social media platforms or those that deliberately inflame tensions for various purposes. What is particularly striking is that established print media, radio stations, and television channels—institutions that are expected to adhere to professional and ethical standards—have themselves become involved in campaigns of daily accusations, the reopening of old grievances, and threats of various kinds. This tendency is further reinforced by the fact that some guests are invited onto talk shows precisely because of their violent and inflammatory rhetoric, which appeals to certain audiences and generates high levels of viewership and engagement for the media outlet.

Violent rhetoric, and insults have often prevailed on social media platforms that operate with limited legal oversight or accountability. Many of these platforms do not adhere to the principles of media ethics and may not even be familiar with such standards. At times, their discourse has descended into obscenity and outright verbal abuse. However, the migration of this type of rhetoric into sections of the print press is particularly concerning. Print journalism has traditionally been regarded as the more “refined” form of media because it is less constrained by the immediacy of news coverage than other media formats, allowing for greater critical and intellectual distance from events. Its printed nature also gives it a lasting documentary function, which would ordinarily require greater attention to its content, style, and narratives.

Nevertheless, much of the print press has itself increasingly adopted violent rhetoric and turned into opposing barricades between fellow members of the same national community. Expressions such as “civil war” and “enemies within” have come to be used with relative ease, alongside accusations of treason and threats of accountability or prosecution. Rather than merely reporting the positions of the different actors, newspapers have increasingly adopted these positions through their editorials, articles, and commentary.

The involvement of newspapers, radio stations, and television channels in the prevailing national division has therefore distanced them from their role of reporting facts and providing the public with the information necessary to form informed and critical opinions. It has also undermined their role in safeguarding the public interest, protecting national unity, and countering division. Instead, they have become parties to the conflict—an approach that runs counter to the ethical principles of journalism.

Furthermore, the increasingly violent tone adopted by political actors and some media outlets risks closing the door to dialogue among the country’s different communities, leaving the nation’s future in the hands of antagonistic parties and an increasingly volatile street. Yet dialogue remains essential among citizens of the same country: it is the only alternative to conflict and the principal means of addressing problems and resolving points of disagreement among the country’s different communities.

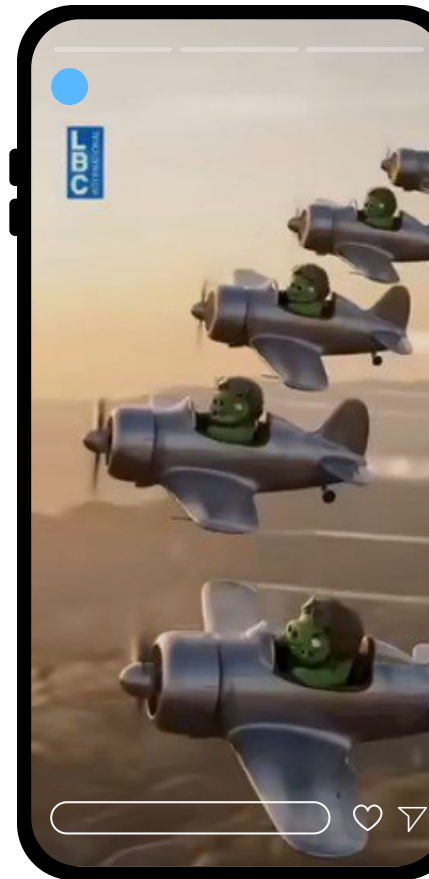
Media Inciting Internal Strife

It is important to document an episode of media warfare that unfolded in parallel with the military conflict, given the significance it acquired and the lessons it offered about Lebanese society. The episode began when LBCI broadcast an animated video of less than one minute, produced using artificial intelligence and inspired by the game Angry Birds. It depicted a battle in which Hezbollah fighters appeared as birds—described by some as chicks—led by Hezbollah Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem, who launches a suicide attacker with a slingshot against a technologically advanced army depicted as pigs and equipped with aircraft and drones, representing the Israeli army. The sequence ends with buildings being destroyed and the chicks fleeing to hide in a hole.

Following the publication of the video, the tone of discourse on social media escalated to the point of what could be described as a “media war.” In terms of its scope, reach, and impact, it overshadowed the military conflict underway in southern Lebanon, given the intensity it reached and the risks it generated. It exposed the extent of fragmentation within Lebanon’s social fabric and the fragility of the country’s civil peace.

Hezbollah’s supporters responded to the video with a campaign primarily targeting Maronite Patriarch Bechara al-Rahi. Social media witnessed a widespread campaign, one of the most prominent examples being an image posted by the singer Ali Barakat in which the Patriarch’s head was replaced with a fighter’s boot. Other manipulated images circulated, including images depicting Patriarch al-Rahi alongside the Israeli Prime Minister.

An image also circulated on social media depicting President Joseph Aoun against the background of an Israeli flag, wearing a Jewish kippah, accompanied by the phrase “A partner in our bloodshed.” The image, considered offensive and unprecedented in the symbolism it employed and the risks it carried, was displayed on a pedestrian bridge along the Old Airport Road, at the Ain al-Delbeh junction and close to the airport, adding further sensitivity to the incident because of its location.



These media campaigns exemplified accusations of treason, and mutual denigration among actors within the same country. This time, the attacks extended to symbols regarded as sacred by certain religious communities, generating considerable tension and resentment. The rhetoric reached a level of violence that raised genuine concerns for civil peace. Wassef Harakeh described the phenomenon in a post as “manufacturing division and fractures, and financing internal strife.”

The reactions that spread across social media and media platforms demonstrated the extent of tension among Lebanese actors and the depth of divisions over national issues and ongoing developments. The situation reached such a dangerous level that it required a rapid response from state officials and political party leaders in an effort to contain the escalation.

The judiciary, which intervened in an attempt to contain this episode of media-driven strife, found no criminal element in the video at the center of the controversy, considering it a form of criticism and satire. Yet the highly charged atmosphere transformed the video into something resembling a time bomb: once it exploded, it reverberated across the political, public, and media spheres. This incident underscores the need for media professionals to remain attentive to the potential consequences of the content they disseminate, irrespective of whether that content is legally permissible. Safeguarding civil peace should be a primary consideration when making publication decisions.



In this context, social media platforms became a front for venting anger, where virtually every form of offensive and obscene language appeared to become permissible, including attacks directed at the highest authorities and at symbols considered sacred by other communities. This represented an unrestrained discourse lacking ethical or national boundaries, as though the battle itself required such behavior. It is the very embodiment of internal strife: when a fellow citizen is transformed into an enemy and a traitor, confrontation against that person comes to be portrayed as both legitimate and necessary.

Reactions to the animated video revealed the fragility of national unity and the high level of tension prevailing in society. They also reaffirmed the depth of the country's division and highlighted genuine risks to civil peace. National unity, however, was not the only casualty of this confrontation; freedom of expression was also affected. Condemnations of the positions expressed did not always distinguish between opinions that remained within ethical and civic boundaries and abusive responses that violated accepted norms.

Criticism of the conduct of public officials remains essential, both as a matter of accountability and in the interest of safeguarding the public good. At the same time, consideration must be given to the sensitivity and potential consequences of such criticism, including whether its broader impact on the public environment is likely to be constructive or harmful.



Professional Errors

Media outlets generally committed a range of professional errors, in addition to ethical shortcomings. These included a lack of accuracy in reporting, prioritizing being first to report over establishing the truth, and covering events from a single perspective rather than considering multiple angles in order to provide a comprehensive account.

One incident illustrating these shortcomings was the missile strike on the town of Ain Saadeh in the Metn district on 5 April 2026, which targeted a residential apartment, killing three people and injuring several others.

Lebanese television and radio outlets, along with most social media platforms, rushed to cover the incident, as is often the case, broadcasting accounts from neighbors, eyewitnesses, and people who happened to be present in the area. The resulting accounts were numerous and contradictory. The most widely circulated version claimed that the missiles had targeted a tenant living on the fourth floor who had escaped unharmed, and that neighbors had seen someone fleeing the scene on a motorcycle.

The owner of the targeted apartment, who arrived at the scene, denied that the apartment had been rented out, as did the head of the municipality. Other media outlets, however, broadcast interviews with people at the scene who claimed that an individual had been regularly visiting the apartment and that it contained personal belongings, suggesting that it was occupied.

Accounts circulated by media outlets and online platforms were numerous, varied, and continued to change throughout the day, making it difficult for the public to determine what had actually happened, particularly given the contradictions among the different versions. Nevertheless, one narrative came to dominate most commentary: that Israel was responsible for the attack.

Despite resulting in three deaths, the incident acquired major national significance compared with other attacks that had caused hundreds of casualties. This was due, first, to its symbolic significance, as the strike targeted a Christian-majority area and one of those killed was affiliated with the Lebanese Forces. It was also due to the broader implications and repercussions attributed to the incident, as well as the professional errors that accompanied its coverage.

The Ain Saadeh strike thus became another case report in how a relatively limited incident can be transformed into an event of national significance. It came to embody Lebanon's deep internal divisions and competing perceptions of the authorities and the state, while providing numerous examples of fearmongering, incitement, and accusations, alongside inaccurate, misleading, and propagandistic media coverage.

3. The Absence of Public-Interest and Citizen-Centered Media

The Absence of an Official State Narrative

There is no such thing as a completely “neutral” event: every event derives meaning from the interpretation assigned to it and the commentary associated with it. The same applies to images. Although an image conveys a certain meaning in itself, the commentary accompanying it can frame it in a way that contradicts its original content and attribute different meanings and interpretations to it.

This helps explain why the narratives advanced by different Lebanese actors regarding the same event can be entirely contradictory, carrying the risk, first, of distorting facts and, second, of deepening divisions among the public. In this context, the absence of an official media body capable of consistently communicating the authorities’ activities and decisions created a significant vacuum. An official state narrative was largely absent, leaving the narratives of competing actors to dominate.

Israeli military spokesperson Avichay Adraee achieved considerable reach through his media role and made significant inroads into the Lebanese information environment. His media presence arguably became comparable in importance to the Israeli military’s operations themselves. He became a primary source of information concerning the ongoing hostilities and was closely followed by audiences across the spectrum.

Moreover, some of the terminology used by Adraee was subsequently adopted by sections of the Lebanese media, thereby contributing to the dissemination of the Israeli narrative of the war. Ghada Haddad drew attention to this phenomenon in an article in Al-Akhbar entitled **“The Deception of ‘Precision Strikes’ and the Engineering of Lebanese Consciousness: When the Media Becomes Israel’s ‘Postman’.**” She wrote: Israeli massacres in Lebanon are transformed into ‘precision strikes’ within a media narrative that redirects the debate away from holding the perpetrator accountable and toward identifying the ‘target.’ As this language is repeatedly used and adopted, the narrative gradually acquires legitimacy, while humanitarian and legal dimensions are marginalized and internal divisions become further entrenched. Terminology itself becomes an instrument for reshaping public consciousness and justifying violence... Terms reshape reality and truth and prevent accountability for Israel... This is what ‘cultivation theory’ explains: continuous exposure to a particular linguistic pattern reshapes perceptions of reality and makes justification part of the natural understanding of events...” [47]

It was therefore necessary for the Lebanese authorities, as is the case in other countries facing similar circumstances, to maintain continuous communication with media outlets and citizens through a dedicated media office. Such a body could have provided a national narrative of events, removed from political polarization, and communicated verified facts in order to counter disinformation and the obscuring of facts. This was particularly important given that the authorities themselves were subjected to criticism and doubts regarding their role and their ability to perform the functions expected of them by different actors, each from their own perspective. They were also accused either of colluding with the enemy or of remaining passive observers.

47- Al-Akhbar, 15 April 2026.

Minister of Information Paul Morcos was subjected to a fierce campaign of criticism from Hezbollah supporters after issuing instructions to official media institutions to stop using the term “resistance” when referring to Hezbollah, in implementation of the government’s decision to halt the party’s military and security activities. In reaction to the decision, the websites of both the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were hacked, with the word **“Fatimiyoun”** appearing on screen in a militarized visual context.

Al-Akhbar wrote: “One might think to ask about the role of the Ministry of Information in regulating aberrant practices that fall outside media standards. But if the ministry has been in a deep sleep throughout the past years, what can be expected today when there is a minister who supports surrender to the enemy?” [48]

The media war surrounding the ongoing military conflict also pushed other fundamental issues out of the media and social media agenda. These included the two-year extension of Parliament’s mandate, which passed largely without attention; the investigation into the Beirut Port explosion; the loss of depositors’ funds; the economic and cost-of-living crisis; and other major public-interest issues.

Media outlets also engaged in battles against one another, challenging their competitors’ credibility, political affiliations, and propagandistic orientations. One example was a dossier published by Al-Akhbar addressing several issues, particularly media outlets hostile to Hezbollah and what the newspaper regarded as their adoption of the Israeli enemy’s narrative.

The newspaper criticized much of the Lebanese media landscape, but focused particularly on Nida al-Watan and An-Nahar, as well as Al Jadeed and LBCI. It characterized them as “Vichy media”—meaning media subordinated to an occupying authority and lacking independence—and went as far as accusing them of “Zionization.”

48- Al-Akhbar, 17 March 2026.

The Place of Citizens in a Politician-Centered Media

There is “big history,” which recounts relations between states, the course of wars, and the evolution of societies. But there is also “small history”: the history of individuals and ordinary people who contribute to shaping that broader history while also becoming its victims. History books recount “big history,” often years after events have taken place. Journalism, by contrast, documents the daily lives of citizens during these wars, and historians will later return to these journalistic records to draw conclusions about the conflicts. This is where the importance of journalism’s documentary role lies.

Moreover, investigative reporting and first-hand observations from within people’s crises convey the suffering of fellow citizens to readers who are physically removed from it. In doing so, journalism brings them closer to the heart of the tragedy and strengthens a sense of shared experience among citizens—an essential element in building a cohesive society whose members share common concerns, risks, and a common destiny.

The overwhelming majority of Lebanese media outlets, however, focus primarily on the news of political figures while remaining distant from the everyday lives and concerns of ordinary citizens. Politicians’ meetings, statements, and activities frequently dominate front pages and the opening segments of radio and television news bulletins, even when these activities are of little significance. Extensive coverage may be devoted to officials’ and religious leaders’ receptions, including the names of visitors received for coffee, accompanied by photographs and lengthy reports, even when such information offers little value to the public. This is one of the problematic traditions of some Lebanese media: journalism centered on public relations and appearances, alongside the promotion of the political class.

The number of internally displaced people exceeded one million, living under extremely difficult material and psychological conditions, alongside thousands of people killed, injured, or missing. These are issues that warrant sustained daily media attention. One of the fundamental roles of the media is to convey people's voices, suffering, and living conditions and to present an accurate picture of society.

Media outlets, across their different formats, should reflect this harsh social reality in order to foster a shared national consciousness that brings citizens together. A situation in which one segment of society sleeps in the streets or in tents while another behaves as though the matter does not concern it risks deepening social divisions, generating resentment, and weakening the sense of national belonging. Some opinion leaders have previously expressed concern about precisely this emerging sentiment and its implications for national unity and the shared destiny of a single people.

Against the backdrop of a major crisis affecting approximately one quarter of Lebanon's population as a result of displacement and forced uprooting caused by the ongoing war, and given the multiple tragedies and risks displaced people faced on a daily basis, the report sought to examine the extent to which the print press paid attention to those forced from their homes and villages.

The report also examined the degree of visibility displaced people received in print journalism, a medium characterized by its relative distance from breaking events and therefore its greater capacity to address their aftermath and broader implications. The space available in print publications also provides greater opportunities for in-depth coverage of such issues.

To assess the attention given by the print press to citizens' everyday concerns, the report monitored Lebanese daily newspapers on Monday, 20 April, and Tuesday, 21 April, focusing specifically on coverage of displaced people and the social consequences of the war.

The first conclusion was that social reporting in Lebanon's daily press was extremely limited and, in some cases, entirely absent. These newspapers rarely covered ordinary citizens in their everyday lives. The press tended to follow what it considered to be "the event," while the ordinary citizen was generally not treated as an event worthy of coverage.

Only the French-language newspaper L'Orient-Le Jour adopted an editorial approach that differed from that of its Arabic-language counterparts. On each of the two days examined by the report, the newspaper devoted more than a full page to people-centered issues: amplifying citizens' voices, describing their daily lives, conveying their experiences and emotions, and presenting the perspectives and observations of victims from their respective points of view.

Newspaper Narratives Detached from Citizens' Everyday Lives

In newspapers published on 20 April, some coverage addressed the displacement of residents from southern towns toward Sidon. However, this coverage remained largely general and framed the issue as a political and social news story rather than following citizens through their lived humanitarian suffering.

Nida al-Watan, for example, published a report entitled “**Sohmor Shares Southern Lebanon’s Nakba Despite Its Geographical Distance from the Frontlines.**” The report stated that “Hezbollah insists that its weapons, which have brought destruction and occupation to Lebanon, constitute a ‘resistance.’” Rather than exploring the humanitarian dimensions of the suffering, however, the report focused primarily on political analysis. No in-depth reports addressing the issue appeared in the other newspapers examined.

These newspapers therefore remained largely detached from the humanitarian and social dimensions of the crisis.

2

Narratives Immersed in Citizens' Everyday Lives

L'Orient-Le Jour stands in contrast to its counterparts through both its editorial approach and the considerable attention it devotes to citizens' concerns. Its journalists meet people, spend time with them, enter their homes, listen to their suffering, and convey their stories. In this respect, it represents a distinctive model.

Among the reports published by the newspaper during the two days examined by the report was an account from inside Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, where Lebanese families forced to leave their homes had sought shelter. Another article focuses on Qassem Shaalan, a 47-year-old Red Cross volunteer whose colleague was killed in the Israeli strikes, as part of the "Diary of an Ordinary War" series, under the title "From Sour to the Serail: Qassem Shaalan, 47, Devoted to the Red Cross."

In its 21 April edition, L'Orient-Le Jour devoted two pages to a special feature under the main headline: **"South Lebanon, as Told by Its People."** The newspaper explained the central idea behind the feature as follows:

"The film begins with a fixed shot of a village. For several seconds, nothing happens. Then, suddenly, everything explodes. Within moments, every building along a street—and sometimes an entire neighborhood—is reduced to ashes. Since 2024, the Israeli army has been destroying a series of border villages in southern Lebanon."

Across the two pages, the newspaper published reports supported by photographs and testimonies from local residents. Headlines included:

- "In Markaba, We Were Living in Paradise. We Realized It When We Lost It."
- "What I Loved Most About My Home in Khiam Was the Garden."
- "Taybeh Is My Childhood, My Fondest Memories, My Family Gatherings."

Through its sustained attention to citizens during wartime and its documentation of their suffering and lived experiences, the newspaper offered a strong example of people-centered print journalism.

CONCLUSION

This report sought to examine the coverage of the war by the print press and social media in order to answer a number of questions about the role of these media: What did daily newspapers document about the war? What issues did they prioritize? What kind of memory are they preserving for future generations? What will those who revisit the information and accounts produced by media and communication platforms in the years to come find? How was the war covered? How much attention was given to citizens experiencing the horrors of war? And what narratives emerged from this coverage?

The research methodology focused on the main events that received the greatest attention from media and communication platforms, including social media. These were the events around which public debate was centered: they were addressed in newspaper editorials, commented on by officials and opinion leaders, and became what are commonly referred to as “trends” on social media.

The report’s findings showed that, through their coverage and positions, the press reflected a deep divide within Lebanese society. Coverage largely presented two opposing camps and two contradictory narratives of events, as though the entire society were engaged in a war in which there was no neutral party and no one remained outside a sense of existential commitment to one side or the other.

These narratives also carried a discourse marked by resentment and relied on a vocabulary characterized by exclusion, hostility, and incitement. Within these narratives, the “other”—despite being a fellow citizen—is portrayed as an adversary and, at times, as an enemy. The other is accused of betraying the country and collaborating with an external enemy, accusations that are presented as sufficient grounds for seeking to eliminate them. Threats that the opposing side will eventually be “held accountable” therefore recur frequently, and in some instances, these threats have taken on explicitly violent and even bloodshed-related connotations.

The narratives also reflect a struggle over identity and over each side's conception of the nation. They are often ideologically driven narratives that embody competing political projects that divide rather than unite, with each side seeking victory through the defeat or elimination of the other. Even official institutions intended to safeguard national unity—including the executive authority, the judiciary, and the security services—are themselves subjected to accusations of treason or subordination.

Within this media landscape, citizens suffering from the effects of war, displacement, and poverty were largely absent. Instead, politicians dominated the coverage, with their voices and positions shaping the narratives. Yet behind every displaced family, every victim, and every destroyed home lies a story that receives little or no attention. This is a media environment that chronicles politicians, their activities, statements, and positions. It is a media environment driven by ideology, serving predetermined objectives and primarily documenting what conforms to its own orientation, particularly during wartime, when public and individual freedoms recede and media outlets themselves become instruments of the conflict.

Lebanese citizens experienced the 2026 war as two parallel wars: a military war and a media war. The two were intertwined and mutually reinforcing, with neither less significant than the other, and with the repercussions of one no less consequential than those of the other. The military war destroyed villages and homes and caused casualties; the media war undermined national unity, threatened civil peace, and revived the atmosphere of the Civil War.

Media discourse was no longer limited to reporting facts and events; it became an instrument of incitement, threats, and fearmongering. The breakdown of language thus became an expression of political breakdown, as Habermas argues. When power takes control of language, public consciousness loses its ability to distinguish between truth and its distorted representation.

Facts consequently became entangled with false information, while partisan and directed discourse aimed at ideologically shaping the public came to dominate. Ethical and professional principles were eroded. Events were no longer presented simply as facts; instead, they became pre-constructed narratives seeking to portray events as the narrator wanted them to appear rather than as they actually occurred.

This is the language of war: different actors perceive the fate of the nation as being at stake, participation in the struggle as necessary for victory, and virtually any form of discourse as permissible in pursuit of their respective objectives. The national interest itself becomes subjective, with each side advancing its own conception of what serves the country. These competing visions collide and struggle against one another, while the nation, its institutions, and its people become fuel for a conflict leading toward an uncertain future.

Each narrative constructed its own selective memory. The focus was no longer on building a shared national collective memory capable of uniting society, but rather on creating a distinct memory for each group, selectively shaped around its own objectives and used to feed its audience's aspirations and promises of victory and revenge against the other.

Yet these narratives may also have a positive value insofar as they reveal how public sentiment was inflamed and driven toward more extreme positions, and how the "other," despite being a member of the same national community, was demonized. They also clearly expose deep divisions over fundamental concepts, including perceptions of the nation, its identity, and competing visions of its future.