

Middle East war

How the Israel-Hizbollah war changed Beirut

Lebanon's capital was hit hard by bombing and an influx of displaced people but residents are rebuilding their lives

Malaika Kanaaneh Tapper in Beirut 7 HOURS AGO

The roar of Israeli warplanes has gone. Shops have reopened in bombed-out buildings, with old friends in cafés hugging each other and thanking God for their safety. Club nights have resumed, though partygoers are advised to be sensitive about flaunting their fun on social media.

In the days since the ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah took hold, residents of Beirut have adapted to the uneasy peace that has set in after more than a year of conflict.

“The city is slowly coming back to life,” said one woman, who ran a shop that sold natural remedies in Basta, a well-known antiques district that was hit by Israeli air strikes in the final hours before the truce came into effect on Wednesday.

But the woman, who did not want to give her name, warned that it would be a long recovery. “Things haven’t returned to normal yet,” she said. “People are still wary.”

In Beirut, like much of the country’s south and east, scars of the war are everywhere. Lebanon’s capital city was hit hard by the conflict, with Israeli bombardment [flattening large parts](#) of its southern suburbs. Though spared the worst of the strikes, central Beirut was also attacked, leaving bombed out cavities on the busy streets.

The vibrant Mediterranean capital has repeatedly been hit by conflict. Empty buildings are still riddled with sniper bullets from a 15-year civil war between 1975 and 1990. Israel also invaded in 1982, and launched a bombing campaign during its war with Hizbollah in 2006. In 2020, a massive port explosion rocked the capital.

When the latest war escalated in September, schools, churches and abandoned buildings in Beirut were overwhelmed with people forced to flee fighting elsewhere. Many are now stuck with nowhere to go.

Rebuilding a country ground down by years of economic crisis and political deadlock will prove a monumental task. The World Bank estimated physical damage from the conflict at \$3.4bn, with the price of reconstruction probably much higher.

Nasser Yassin, the minister in charge of the state's emergency response, said the list of immediate challenges was so great that it was too soon to even begin preparing for a long-term recovery.

"I don't think we are in the day after," Yassin said. "We're still in a phase before reaching the day after. The day after would require a lot of investment and reconstruction and economic recovery."

The war began after Hizbollah fired rockets into Israel following Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack. The cross-border conflict spiralled after Israel escalated its bombing campaign in September and launched a ground invasion.

Israel's stated goal was to push the Iran-backed Shia militant group back from the border and ensure the safe return of 60,000 displaced Israelis. About 140 Israelis were killed, while nearly 4,000 people were killed and 1.2mn were displaced in Lebanon.





Despite the destruction, Beirut 'is slowly coming back to life', a resident says © Malaika Tapper/FT

Many of them ended up in shelters in Beirut and elsewhere. Yassin said that about 500,000 people have had their houses damaged or destroyed, and 150,000 come from border villages that have been wiped out entirely or remain under Israeli control.

While nearly 80 per cent of those in shelters left within two days of the ceasefire, according to government data, shelter administrators across the capital said some people have stayed. Some have left and returned after finding that their houses were uninhabitable.

Laila, a former social worker sheltering in a disused school in Hamra, a commercial district near the sea where thousands had sought refuge, sat outside her white tent as families loaded up vans and departed for home.

She felt none of their euphoria: Her home in southern Beirut was levelled in an Israeli strike. "I went back to see it and to rescue my winter clothes," she said. "But it was just rubble . . . I have nowhere to go back to."

It is unclear where the money for rebuilding will come from. Iran has previously footed the bill but a tighter budget and western restrictions might curb its contributions. Gulf states cut aid years ago, frustrated by corruption, the lack of reform and the country's political malaise.

The damage done to Hizbollah, whose leadership and ranks were devastated by the

Israeli offensive, also means that it may not have the financial capacity to make the same prompt and generous payouts it did after the 2006 war.

“Before, Qatar, Iran, and other donors would pour money into the reconstruction,” said Sami Atallah, founding director of Beirut-based The Policy Initiative think-tank. “It’s about time that the state takes the lead.”

In Beirut, daily life is rushing back nonetheless. In the majority-Christian eastern quarter, which was untouched by bombs, wine bars that had been empty for weeks were suddenly fully booked with customers spilling on to the streets.

In Basta, shoppers strolled nonchalantly past the pile of broken furniture and smashed concrete left by an air strike, while a welder repaired the sign above a juice shop.

The owner of a jewellery shop on the ground floor surveyed his empty cases and shattered windows but said he planned to reopen within two weeks.

“Luckily, the jewels were in the back because it was night when they hit,” he said. “It’s going to cost so much to fix, but it can all be done.”

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