

# Washington and its allies work to destabilise Lebanon

## Part two

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*This is the second part of a two-part article examining the background to the current crisis in Lebanon. The first part was posted August 23.*

The 2009 elections resulted in a majority vote for Hezbollah and its allies, but translated into a narrow majority in terms of parliamentary seats for the March 14 Alliance, which formed a fractious coalition with Hezbollah's allies. But the tenure of Saad Hariri's government was always precarious. It was discredited by the release of cables documenting its support for the Israeli assault in 2006, and a series of arrests confirmed that Tel Aviv had long pulled the strings in Beirut.

Between 2009 and 2010, the Lebanese authorities broke up more than 25 spy rings, captured sophisticated surveillance and communications gear disguised as innocuous household gadgets, and arrested more than 70 people on charges of spying for Israel. Those arrested included a colonel in army intelligence and a retired army general who ran a housecleaning service for a garage owner who specialised in supplying Hezbollah with vehicles that he secretly fitted with tracking devices. Some had been working for the Israelis since the 1980s, while others were recruited after the 2006 war.

Two agents were sentenced to death for blowing up a Palestinian Islamist leader and his brother in a car in 2006, while another was charged separately with killing two top Hezbollah men, as well as the son of Ahmad Jibril, the founder and leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC).

At the end of 2010, Saad Hariri bowed to pressure from the US, which opposed any accommodation with Hezbollah, and went back on a Saudi-Syrian brokered

agreement with Hezbollah over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), precipitating the collapse of his government. Hezbollah had demanded that Hariri convene a cabinet meeting to repudiate the politically motivated tribunal that was expected to blame Hezbollah, withdraw Lebanese judges from the STL and cease funding it.

Contrary to Washington's expectations, Hezbollah emerged as the leading political force. It brought down the Hariri government and, with the support of the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement and the Druze Christian-based Progressive Socialist Party, installed a government more sympathetic to Damascus under billionaire businessman Najib Mikati.

Washington deemed this to be an illegitimate coup. The Obama administration, confronted with popular uprisings that ousted longtime allies Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt just weeks later, threatened to cut off aid and even intervene militarily against the new Lebanese government.

Anti-Gaddafi opposition broke out in Benghazi in Libya, but Washington, with the help of local proxies Riyadh, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, ensured that its people on the ground built alliances with the National Transitional Council that would provide the launching pad for a NATO-led invasion to topple Gaddafi and install a pliant stooge regime under the guise of the UN's "responsibility to protect" charter.

When anti-regime demonstrations broke out in Syria just days after the start of the NATO assault on Libya, Washington had its forces on the ground aiming to do the same by means of a sectarian war, funded and armed by its allies in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

Lebanon was to play a major role in this operation

from the start, transporting arms, jihadist fighters and mercenaries to the insurgents and providing safe havens for the oppositionists to regroup and launch attacks on Syrian regime targets as well as the Syrian population, in the form of terrorist attacks, rapes, kidnappings and executions. Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city and a Sunni stronghold, became the entry port for both arms and fighters destined for the Syrian "rebels."

Within Lebanon, the Saudis and other oil-rich Gulf sheikhdoms have launched an unrelenting propaganda war against Hezbollah and financed and armed their Sunni supporters. The country is now awash with weapons, with Reuters reporting an "array of armed groups, which are already arming themselves, across the country."

Sectarianism also serves to divide working people. Workers, irrespective of their sect, face low-paid jobs—when they can get them—rising prices, and a shortage of water, electricity, schools and other vital services. The number of strikes has risen, but the government, beholden to the financial elite, cannot agree on fixing a minimum wage or resolving the electricity shortage.

While Tel Aviv has largely kept a low profile during the campaign to unseat Assad, although constantly beating the drums of war against Iran, it has recently become more bellicose towards both Syria and Lebanon. It has blamed Hezbollah and Iran for the bomb attack in Bulgaria that killed six tourists, five of whom were Israelis, without any evidence. Last week, the US responded by including Hezbollah in a new round of sanctions on Iran and Syria. A Treasury Department statement even cited Hezbollah's secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, for personally overseeing support for the Syrian regime. The US castigated the European Union for failing to follow suit.

Leading Israeli politicians are openly stating that Israel might destroy parts of Lebanon and Gaza should Hezbollah and Hamas launch attacks on Israel in retaliation for an Israeli strike on Iran. Vice Premier Silvan Shalom said in a radio interview that Israel could attack infrastructure such as power plants, oil refineries and airports in Lebanon and Gaza and paralyse daily life there.

Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the US, expressed concerns about Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons amid the country's worsening civil war, and

the possibility that they might fall into the hands of terrorists, or that Syria might send them to Hezbollah. This scare-mongering is aimed at providing a pretext for a military assault on one or the other country.

The destabilisation of Lebanon and the descent into a sectarian civil war flow inexorably from the machinations of the US and its satellites in the region. These same forces are also involved in destabilising the Iraqi government—nine years after the US-led war to overthrow the dictatorship of former ally Saddam Hussein and the occupation of the country to install what Washington hoped would be a more pliant regime.

The effort by the US, not just in Syria and Lebanon but throughout the Middle East, to whip up sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shia has two inter-related aims: to mobilize forces against Syria and Iran and to suppress any unified struggle of impoverished workers in the Gulf sheikhdoms, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere, many of whom are Shi'a.

The only force capable of preventing a wider war in the Middle East is the working class. Workers, irrespective of their religion, language or ethnicity, have an interest in opposing both imperialist intervention and the assault on their living standards. What is required is a unified struggle of the working class against the cause of their oppression—the profit system—and for the United Socialist States of the Middle East. This requires the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the region.



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