



THE CROSSROADS OF CRISIS:

Terrorism, Refugees, and Public Policy in Lebanon

Brigadier General Elias Aad

Introduction

Since its independence in 1943, Lebanese leaders have faced unique challenges reflecting factors that have shaped the country's social and cultural structure, among these factors are religious factions. National leaders adopted power sharing in the democratic confessional political system to pacify the historical tensions among the religious sects. Unfortunately, Lebanon achieved limited success in this endeavor. The confessional system is based on the 24th article of the Lebanese Constitution and relies on equal representation among various sects and proportional representation among geographic regions.

Throughout its modern history, Lebanon has witnessed several conflicts and disagreements between different communities. There is the risk that any internal conflict will escalate into sectarian clashes because Lebanon is a multi-sectarian nation based on a confessional system. Since the 1960s, as the number of Palestinian refugees has increased, inter-sectarian tensions appeared in the social fabric of the country. The presence of Palestinian refugees awakened the fear of other groups of toppling the confessional system. In 1975, this fear turned into a violent confrontation. This violence later escalated into a civil war that involved sectarian rivalries and neighboring countries like Syria and the Israeli

enemy¹. In 1989, the Taif Agreement² between all Lebanese factions ended the civil war in 1990. This agreement recalibrated the power-sharing confessional system that constitutes the cornerstone of the sectarian balance. The current flow of more than one and a half million Syrian is like the Palestinian refugee flow, and even far bigger. The socio-economic downturn, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut port blast, has contributed to nine out of ten Syrian refugees living in extreme poverty³. The new refugee crisis has increased sectarian tensions and threatens the fragile internal balance between different factions.

Despite the numerous vulnerabilities Lebanon possesses, the government has maintained internal stability. Nevertheless, the rise of violent radical extremism and activity on the part of the Islamic State along the 375-km border with Syria till 2017, when the Lebanese Army launched an assault to drive out ISIS militants who had established a presence in the border region between Lebanon and Syria. The battle lasted for several days, with intense fighting taking place in the rugged terrain of the border region. Eventually, the militants were driven out, and the Lebanese Army declared victory. The Battle of Fajr al-Jouroud was seen as a significant victory in the fight against terrorism in Lebanon and the wider region. It demonstrated the effectiveness of the Lebanese Army in defending the country against the threat posed by ISIS and other terrorist groups.

The present situation of the Islamic State (ISIS) is one of decline and territorial loss. At its peak in 2014, ISIS controlled a sizable portion of territory in Iraq and Syria and was a major global threat. However, in the years since then, the group has suffered a significant loss of territory and resources due to military offensives by local and international forces.

In Iraq, the group's territorial control has been largely dismantled, with its presence limited to a few pockets of rural areas. In Syria, the group has lost

1- David Chuter, "Perceptions and Prescriptions: How Lebanese People View Their Security." International Alert, 2015. http://www.internationalalert.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon_SSRSynthesis_EN_2015.pdf.

2- For further information on the Taif agreement you can visit the New World Encyclopedia at: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Taif_Agreement

3- UNHCR Lebanon: Fact sheet, December 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unhcr-Lebanon-fact-sheet-December-2022>

control of its major cities and towns, and its territorial presence has been reduced to small pockets of territory in remote areas.

Despite these losses, ISIS remains a significant threat. The group has shifted its focus from territorial control to guerrilla-style attacks and has continued to conduct deadly attacks in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. It has also maintained a strong presence in the virtual world, with its propaganda and recruitment efforts continuing to pose a significant threat and an increased number of terrorist sleeper cells that threaten stability.

As the Islamic State lost most of its territory in Iraq and Syria, it may respond with terrorist attacks outside these countries, as we see today in Afghanistan, to keep its status as the pre-eminent Jihadist organization in the world. The same scenario happened in November 2015 when the insurgency lost control of some areas in Iraq and Syria—it conducted attacks in Paris and Beirut.

The future of the Islamic State remains uncertain, and the group will likely continue to pose a significant security threat for the foreseeable future. The group has demonstrated a significant ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and its continued resilience and ability to carry out attacks suggests that it will remain a significant security challenge in the region and beyond. This fact brings out the necessity of a counter-terrorism public policy to face the threat of ISIS and other violent extremist terrorist groups and keep the stability and security of the country.

The Lebanese Army has proved its combat effectiveness, executing the fierce battle against ISIS which took place in Arsal on the eastern borders in August 2017. But still, important challenges facing the army were security concerns and the protection of the borders to prevent the risk of the infiltration of armed militants into Lebanon. The Lebanese Army focuses its efforts on protecting internal security by chasing terrorist networks and uncovering dormant cells in successful preemptive operations⁴.

4- Hijab Shah and Melissa Dalton, *Playing Politics: International Security Sector Assistance and the Lebanese Military's Changing Role*, Carnegie, September, 2020.
https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Shah_Dalton_-_Lebanon_Security_Assistance.pdf.



Statement and Research Question

Lebanon is facing severe economic crises with no near solution, adding to a fragile social cohesion tested daily. Since 2019, the country has witnessed riots against the government in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic that made the economic crisis worse. Lebanon witnessed in the last months the return of a few radical and extremist activities, especially in the northern part of the country. These radical groups may turn into a near danger that must be faced under the spread of poverty and the lack of social aid to the Lebanese people. This research paper examines the Islamic State as a potential threat added to the huge numbers of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, which pose direct threats to Lebanon's internal security and threaten to destabilize the entire region further. The Lebanese government must enact actions and measures to reduce the effects of the refugees and radicalized groups on Lebanese security and society.

As the battle against the Islamic State continues in the region, the Lebanese government should adopt additional strategies to increase national resilience and prevent the spread of violence, sectarianism, and radicalization. This research paper will provide recommendations for the necessity of a counter-terrorism public policy to achieve security and stability in Lebanon.



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Chapter One

Lebanon and Terrorism

The IHS (Information Handling Services) annual country report on Lebanon, released in September 2016, stated, "There is a high risk of refugee militancy and escalation of communal violence into civil war in the coming three years"⁵. The Islamic State claims responsibility for ruling the whole Muslim world under its proclaimed "Caliphate." The insurgency in Iraq and Syria had been a critical international issue and a threat not only to the stability of the Middle East but also to the people of Lebanon. The position of Lebanon in the middle of the Levant Region makes it vulnerable to the territorial expansion project and terrorist attacks of the Islamic State and other radicalized groups. Indeed, these terrorist organizations sought to control Lebanese territories to spread their ideology, establish sleeper cells, and recruit supporters.

The Islamic State seeks to exploit vulnerabilities in targeted states to execute its nation-building plan. Understanding one's vulnerabilities is crucial. "If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt"⁶. Understanding the threat and how it emerged is critical to success. Examining the refugee crisis in Lebanon is also essential to determine if it represents a critical vulnerability that the Islamic State or other Jihadi groups can exploit. Also, it's important to know the current public policy of the Lebanese government to counter-terrorism.

1-The Lebanese Army fighting terrorism

The LAF reacted to the threat of terrorism before other armies of the world and before terrorism became a global danger. In early 2000, the LAF fought a harsh battle against a terrorist group that was holed up around *Jroud al-Doniyeh* (Doniyeh outskirts) in northern Lebanon. They were equipped with heavy and medium weapons and planned to establish an extremist emirate in northern Lebanon. The LAF successfully accomplished the mission and captured many terrorists.

5- "Country Reports on Terrorism", The United States of America: Department Of State, 2020. https://www.state.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2021/07/Country_Reports_on_Terrorism_2020.pdf.

6- Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Translated by Lionel Giles, <https://classics.mit.edu/Tzu/artwar.html>.

In 2007, the LAF again fought a long battle, this time against *Fatah al-Islam* in Nahr el-Bared camp in northern Lebanon; the terrorist organization was planning a takeover of the north for use as a base to spread terrorism over other parts of the country. This battle ended with the elimination of a large number of terrorists.

In 2013, a terrorist group led by Ahmad al-Assir in the Saida region, in the south of Lebanon, attacked military posts in the area. The LAF fought back and managed to eliminate the threat quickly.

After these events, the Syrian Civil War erupted in 2011, it created an environment that is easy for extremists to manipulate for radicalization purposes. This war has had significant implications for Lebanon and will continue to do so. From the influx of refugees to the rise of Salafi Jihadism in the country, the negative consequences of the conflict have proven difficult for the Lebanese government to address.

Dangerous terrorist organizations participating in the Syrian events, the most prominent of which were ISIS and *Jabhat al-Nusra*, used the northern and the northeastern borders of Lebanon with Syria and began dispatching booby traps, carrying out rocket attacks, and launching rockets into Lebanon. These attacks included an incursion in 2014 into the town of Arsal on the eastern border and attacks on troops deployed in the region, with the aim of seizing the area extending from the eastern mountains to the sea in the northern city of Tripoli. The LAF was on guard for such a move. It carried out a large-scale attack in which it managed to expel the terrorists from Arsal and its surroundings.

The LAF's capabilities were tested yet again in *Fajr al-Jouroud*, the 2017 operation against ISIS on the northeastern border. The LAF launched a series of aerial attacks and ground maneuvers. Operation *Fajr al-Jouroud* cornered the surviving fighters into a valley adjacent to the Syrian border, driving them out of the Lebanese territories.

The LAF was the first among all armies of the region to achieve, alone, victory over ISIS. However, despite this great victory, the danger of terrorism remains in Lebanon, an assumption the LAF acts on by monitoring terrorist cells along with pre-emptive military security operations and eliminating them directly in their infancy.

Violence and bloodshed in Lebanon's neighboring Syria have increased pre-existing tensions in the Lebanese society. The Islamic State and other radicalized groups exploit these tensions to threaten the stability of the country.

These facts bring out the necessity of building a national counter-terrorism public policy to face all these threats and to deal with the roots of the problem, not its symptoms.

2- Emergence of the Islamic State

Scholars, journalists, policymakers, and others have set forth works of varying scholarship and efficacy since the Islamic State first emerged to describe how a confluence of geopolitical factors and deep-seated sectarian violence led to the emergence of the Islamic State. Recent scholarship has offered detailed examinations of the root causes in Iraq and Syria that led to the Islamic state upheaval. In *ISIS: A History*, Fawaz Gerges focuses on four factors that led to the rebirth of this insurgency. First, Gerges considered the Islamic State as an extension of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which itself emerged as a result of the U.S.-led coalition invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. Unfortunately, the invasion contributed to the destruction of Iraqi institutions and strengthened ethnic and religious divisions. Ultimately, this created the environment where AQI and later the Islamic State flourished⁷.

Gerges also argues the shattering of the post-Saddam Hussein political establishment and the incapacity of implementing policies that empower a nation's national identity fed the intercommunal distrust and deepened the Sunni-Shia division. This division provided the Islamic State with a social base among aggrieved Sunnis, and later, the insurgency exploited this sectarianism to expand and gain more power. Gerges also argues the Syrian Civil War and the breakdown of the state were important factors in the emergence of the Islamic State.

Michael Van Dusen expands on Gerges's arguments, in his article "ISIS is About the Arab Past, Not the Future," where he contends the Islamic State

7- Gerges, Fawaz. 2016. *ISIS: A History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

is “The latest and most frightening manifestation of the quest for meaningful statehood by Arabs who have repeatedly been disappointed, degraded, and humiliated by their governments and by the policies of foreign powers.” Van Dusen argued that three local and international factors shaped the collapse of Arab societies in the current spate of violence. The first factor is the continued foreign military intervention in the region. Second is the unresolved historical Israeli-Arab conflict in the Middle East. The third and most important issue is the nature of local Arab governance and domestic rule. For those who join the Islamic State, the Caliphate represents a better economic, social, and political entity than states in the existing contemporary Arab world⁸.

In 2022, regional and international security remained at risk from ISIS and its regional branches. The actual affiliates and allies of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the world are not well-defined and can vary over time. The group has attracted a diverse range of supporters, from individuals who have joined the group's cause to other extremist organizations that have pledged allegiance to the group. However, some of the most prominent affiliates and allies of ISIS include⁹ :

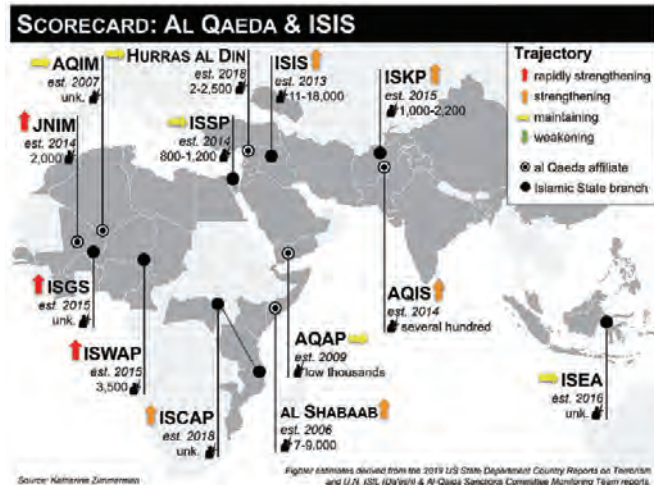
AQAP: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	ISGS: Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
AQIS: Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	ISKP: Islamic State Khorasan Province
AQIM: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	ISSP: Islamic State Sinai Province
ISCAP: Islamic State Central Africa	ISWAP: Islamic State West Africa
ISEA: Islamic State East Asia	JNIM: Jamaat Nasr al Islam wa al Muslimin

8- Michael Van Dusen, *ISIS Is About the Arab Past Not the Future*, Woodrow Wilson Center, 2015.

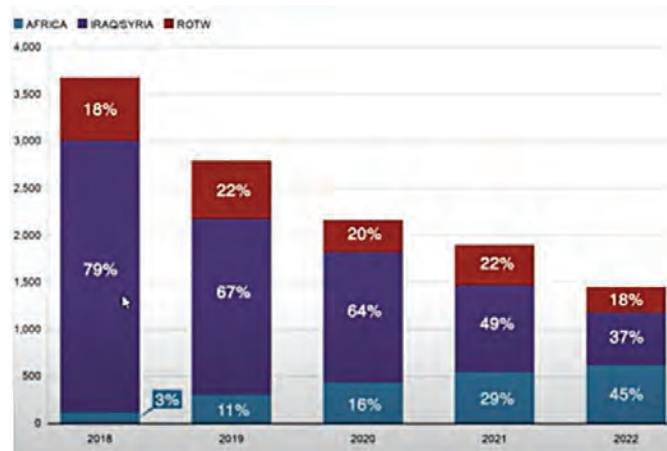
9- Katherine Zimmerman, *Al Qaeda & ISIS 20 Years after 9/11*, Woodrow Wilson Center. September 8, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-isis-20-years-after-911>.

Since the COVID-19 epidemic started in 2019, they have strategically sought to benefit from current trends worldwide. First, organizations connected to ISIS celebrated the Taliban's coup in 2021 as a jihadist success. They saw it as a blueprint for achieving their objectives in the conflict with the West. Second, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has altered global priorities, making Western backing for Ukraine a top priority. ISIS-affiliated groups now have more opportunities to conduct secure operations in jihadist zones as a result of the overemphasis on Ukraine. Third, security voids have developed as a result of the withdrawal of Western soldiers from regions where jihadist organizations have operated. Due to the shortcomings of the municipal governments at the time, these organizations have been successful. Fourth, the prison breakouts gave ISIS fighters possibilities in 2022. ISIS, for instance, attacked the al-Sina jail in Syria's al-Hasakah province. About three-quarters of the 500 fatalities during the eight-day combat were ISIS fighters. Although ISIS's effort to break out of prison was unsuccessful and cost the organization numerous fighters, it demonstrated the group's ability to engage in multiday combat¹⁰. Till now the ISIS threat is still imminent.

On 17 February 2023, an ISIS terrorist assault in the southeast of the city of Al-Sokhna, in the eastern countryside of Homs, claimed the lives of 53 Syrian civilians who were gathering truffles.



ISIS and Al-Qaeda: Affiliates and number of fighters in the world (Zimmerman 2021)



ISIS-Claimed Attacks between January 2018 and October 2022 (Cengiz 2023)

10- Mahmut Cengiz, Is ISIS Really a Defeated Terrorist Organization?, Homeland Security Today, USA, December 19, 2023, <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/is-isis-really-a-defeated-terrorist-organization>.

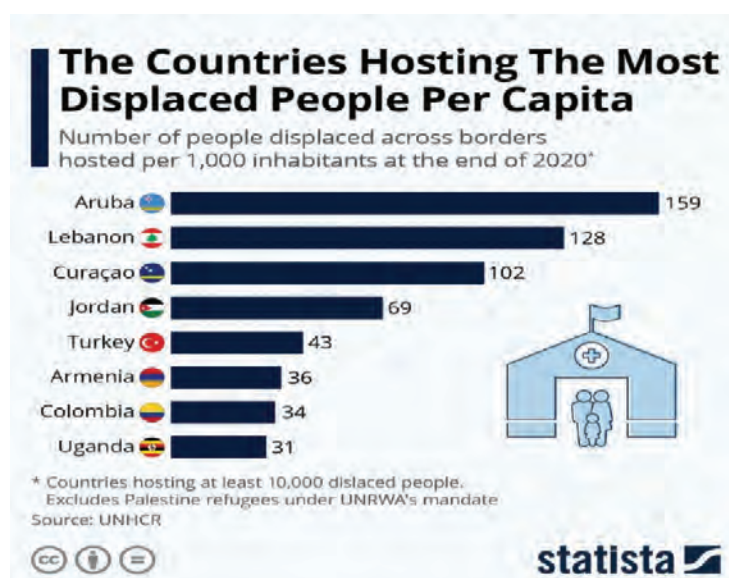


Chapter Two

The Refugee Crisis in Lebanon

Lebanon's geographic position in the Middle East makes it particularly vulnerable to refugee flows from regional conflicts. The UNHCR says that "Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita worldwide." It refers to the "Government estimates 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 13,715 refugees of other nationalities, and adds that "90% of Syrian refugees are living in extreme poverty"¹¹.

The Palestinian camps in Lebanon suffer from socio-economic problems that have grown worse over the last ten years because of the growing number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War. Indeed, the harsh living conditions for residents of the camp have made recruiting new militants for radical groups an easy task¹². In general, Lebanese society has had difficult experiences with the Palestinian camps, which contain large numbers of Islamic extremists. More than one million and a half Syrian refugees scattered throughout the country have only exacerbated the problem, and the fear of the spread of radicalism is growing¹³.



The countries with the most refugees per capita (UNHCR 2022)

11- "UNHCR Lebanon at a Glance." 2023. UNHCR Lebanon, <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/at-a-glance>.

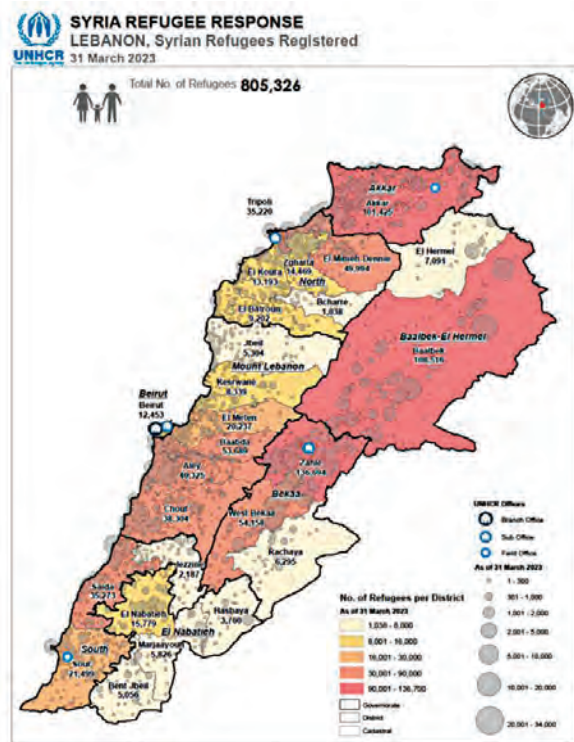
12- Jimmy Matar, The Islamic State in Lebanon – An Overview, Meirss: Middle East Institute for Research and Strategic Studies, 2015, <http://meirss.org/the-islamic-state-in-lebanon-an-overview/>.

13- UNHCR Lebanon: Fact sheet, December, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unhcr-Lebanon-fact-sheet-December-2022>.

There is also Lebanese resentment against refugees due to the socioeconomic problems that they are causing. Lebanese citizens believe refugees are taking their jobs and lowering the wages of the laborers.

This section will examine scholarship on the refugee crisis in Lebanon, especially the massive inflow of Syrian refugees the Islamic State hopes to take advantage of to threaten the safety and stability of Lebanon. In their *International Interactions* article, “Radicalism of the Hopeless: Refugee Flows and Transnational Terrorism,” Daniel Milton, Megan Spencer, and Michael Findley examine whether the movement of refugees across a country’s borders raises the possibility of terrorist attacks in the host state. Milton et al. study the relationship between refugee flows and the number of terrorist attacks that refugees commit in host countries, conducting empirical tests using data on global international refugee flows and transnational terrorism. The authors model the consequences of refugee movements on transnational terrorist aggression within a “directed dyad framework” to account for characteristics of origin and host states¹⁴.

Milton et al. found that refugee movements considerably heighten the probability and number of transnational terrorist attacks that occur in host countries. Indeed, the authors argue because host nations treat refugees poorly, refugees often find themselves in terrible living situations that contribute to their resentment of the host government, making them vulnerable to radicalization and involvement in terrorist activities against host communities. This does not mean that all refugees will turn into terrorists. Still, the intention of the



14- Daniel Milton, Megan Spencer, and Michael Findley, Radicalism of the Hopeless: Refugee Flows and Transnational Terrorism, *International Interactions* 39, no. 5, 2013, p. 621-645.

individuals to participate in terrorist attacks increases proportionally with the size of the refugee flow. The magnitude of the flow will also affect how host states see refugee threats. Milton et al. concluded that population movements are an essential mechanism by which conflict spreads across regions. The authors emphasized that the existence of displaced people and refugees can also heighten the likelihood of future conflict in both host and origin countries¹⁵.

Other scholars find that the presence of refugees does not contribute to more conflict. In "Questioning Refugee Camps as Sources of Conflict," Andrew Shaver and Yang-Yang Zhou contradict Milton et al.'s conclusions, arguing that refugee flow does not increase the likelihood of conflict in either the host or the country of origin. Indeed, Shaver and Zhou contend regions that host refugees tend to have more stability over time because these areas receive massive amounts of humanitarian aid from special organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and that may enhance the stability and security. Shaver and Zhou also refute Milton et al.'s argument that because refugee flows often include combatants, arms, and ideologies, this may cause a direct conflict with the host government. Alternatively, Shaver and Zhou found that most refugees are civilians who did not participate in conflicts in their country of origin due to their incapability or refusal. Thus, they often refrain from engaging in a new civil conflict. Furthermore, Shaver and Zhou argue that local police, humanitarian organizations, and often military units secure refugee camps, making interdicting violent actions much easier¹⁶.

What Shaver and Zhou do not cover in detail is what Milton et al. contend is the importance of the magnitude of the flow of refugees. In Lebanon, one-third of the country's population are Syrian and Palestinian refugees. In the Palestinian refugee camps, the government is struggling to establish security in the surrounding areas. The other 1.5 million Syrian refugees are scattered all over the country, which presents significant security and logistical challenges. Indeed, while Shaver and Zhou contend that all of these refugees are civilians, the authors do not account for universal conscription

15- Ibid.

16- Andrew Shaver, and Yang-Yang Zhou , Questioning Refugee Camps as Sources of Conflict, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, 2015.

in Syria. Each adult male over eighteen has a mandatory two-year term in the army. Thus, the men in the 1.5 million refugees will most likely have had some military training.

Understanding the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon requires an assessment of the country's present political and security situation. Cathrine Thorleifsson, in her *Third World Quarterly* journal article, "The Limits of Hospitality: Coping Strategies Among Displaced Syrians in Lebanon," examines the dynamics and consequences of Syrian refugee presence in the Northern Lebanese village of Bebnine. Thorleifsson conducted in-depth interviews with thirty-seven Syrian and Lebanese men and women in 2013. She supplemented the information in this pool with statistics from a national opinion poll conducted by the Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies. Thorleifsson argues that Syrian refugees are victims of a humanitarian crisis. Their role is passive, and they are at times overwhelmed in trying to deal with the challenges of displacement. Indeed, Thorleifsson discovered that both Syrians and Lebanese have great fear of spillover from the Syrian Civil War to Lebanon and the increased chance for a sectarian conflict in the country. She concludes that refugee status alone provides no direct connection to acts of violence. Still, the Lebanese community does experience the continued presence of Syrian refugees as a burden and threat. Most Lebanese believe that refugees are taking job opportunities and lowering wages, increasing competition over jobs and causing communal tensions¹⁷.

Seung-Whan Choi and Idean Salehyan, in their *Conflict Management and Peace Science* journal article, "No Good Deed Goes Unpunished: Refugees, Humanitarian Aid, and Terrorism," elaborate on these sectarian tensions, focusing on the issue that there is a high risk of sporadic attacks against aid workers and refugees from militants in the host community, which would have devastating effects on the security and stability of the country. Choi and Salehyan argue that low opportunity costs coupled with seeking a sense of purpose may urge some refugees to walk away from camps and join armed groups. The authors also contend that just the presence of refugees and foreigners might push some right-wing radicals to launch attacks against immigrants¹⁸.

17- Cathrine Thorleifsson, *The Limits of Hospitality: Coping Strategies Among Displaced Syrians in Lebanon*, *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 6, 2016, p.1071-1082.

18- Seung-Whan Choi, and Idean Salehyan, *No Good Deed Goes Unpunished: Refugees, Humanitarian Aid, and Terrorism*, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 2013.



According to the UNHCR, there are three solutions to a country's refugee problem: resettlement to a third country, voluntary repatriation, or local integration¹⁹. Unfortunately, there are several issues with these solutions. First, resettlement is unlikely for many refugees, especially with the current anti-immigrant atmosphere in the Western world²⁰. Second, even if a portion of refugees can return to their country, new refugees will continue to emerge if the armed conflict in the home country continues. Finally, Lebanon faces issues with local integration for a variety of reasons.

In addition to the socio-economic problems that Syrian refugees have contributed to, their presence has also created a political debate. In the *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* article "In the Wake of the Islamic State Threat: Repercussions on Sunni-Shi'i Competition in Lebanon," Aurélie Daher examines the Islamic State's reasons for involving itself in Lebanon. Daher conducted a historical, chronological analysis of military confrontation between Lebanese armed forces and Islamic militants to determine the

19- Solutions, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/solutions.htm>.

20- Somini Sengupta, 60 Million People Fleeing Chaotic Lands, U.N. Says, The New York Times, June 18, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/18/world/60-million-people-fleeing-chaotic-lands-un-says.html>.

actual range of possibilities that exist for the Islamic State in Lebanon. Because of previous bad experiences with refugees, Lebanese people often fear that Syrian refugees will not return to Syria and will jeopardize the balance of power in the confessional Lebanese political system²¹. Daher concludes that “the threat of an annexationist radical Islam is very real to Lebanon,” due to both a large number of Syrian refugees and the sympathy that some Islamic jihadists have a non-negligible portion of the Sunni population in the Lebanese community”²².

Other scholars support Daher’s view that the Syrian refugee crisis is a viable threat to the stability of the Lebanese confessional system. In the *Security Studies* journal article “Refugee Flows, Ethnic Power Relations, and the Spread of Conflict,” Daniel Krcmaric seeks to answer why refugee flows created violent conflict in one host nation-state but not in others. Krcmaric argues that when the number of refugees changes the ethnic balance in the host nation, it will be difficult to resolve bargaining problems between ethnic groups without violence. As evidence, he compared a case study of the flow of Kosovar Albanian refugees into Macedonia and Albania. Krcmaric concluded these refugees caused violent conflict with host nation citizens in Macedonia because they altered the ethnic balance of power, whereas on the other side, in Albania, that alteration did not occur²³.

In addition, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon face significant challenges with regard to their legal status and protection. The Lebanese government has not officially recognized the majority of Syrian as refugees, and many lack the necessary documentation to access services and protection. This has left them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and has made it difficult for them to access the support and protection they need.

The contagious sectarian disease so prevalent in Iraq and Syria may further spill over. “The higher incidences of war in the geographical neighborhood of a country increase the incidence of war in that country. Also, the risk of contagion

21- This system of government in Lebanon proportionally allocates political power among the country’s religious communities – Christians, Sunnis, and Shi’as – according to their percentage of the population.

22- Aurelie Daher, In the Wake of the Islamic State: Repercussions on the Sunni-Shi’i Competition in Lebanon, *Journal of Shi’a Islamic Studies*, 2015.

23- Daniel Krcmaric, Refugee Flows, Ethnic Power Relations, and the Spread of Conflict, *Security Studies* 23, no. 1, 2014, p. 182-216.

across the borders is real and hence that localized conflicts, if not quickly pacified, can have a vast diffusion and eventually expand to the entire region”²⁴.

The troubled economic situation in Lebanon poses burdens for most of the population. Tripoli and Akkar, in the north, suffer from a higher level of poverty and unemployment in comparison to the rest of the country. These regions have the highest unemployment rates in the country, with 65 percent unemployment in Minniyeh-Dennieh and nearly 60 percent in Akkar. Public institutions, including schools and health centers, also need more national-level support²⁵. There is a feeling of inequality with respect to accessing the infrastructure and the educational system between Lebanon’s main urban areas and the poorer northern region. This sense of inequality has amplified the perception of discrimination. Poverty and lack of education attract radical Islamic organizations like the Islamic State and foreign states’ intervention, which will fill the void and exploit the youth dissatisfaction by encouraging commitment to terrorist actions.

Lebanon: Unemployment rate from 2004 to 2023

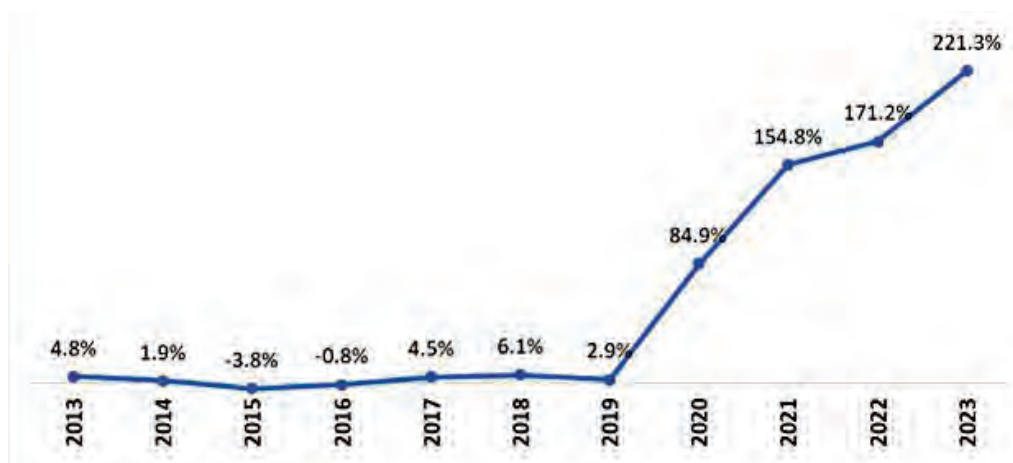


24- Fabrizio Carmignani, and Parvinder Kler, Surrounded by Wars: Quantifying the Role of Spatial Conflict Spillovers, *Economic Analysis and Policy* 49, July, 2016, www.elsevier.com/locate/eap.

25- Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2022, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=10006>.

The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is made even more challenging by the ongoing economic crisis in the country. The crisis has resulted in a significant devaluation of the Lebanese currency, high inflation, and a shortage of basic goods, making it even more difficult for refugees to meet their basic needs.

Annual inflation rate 2013-2023

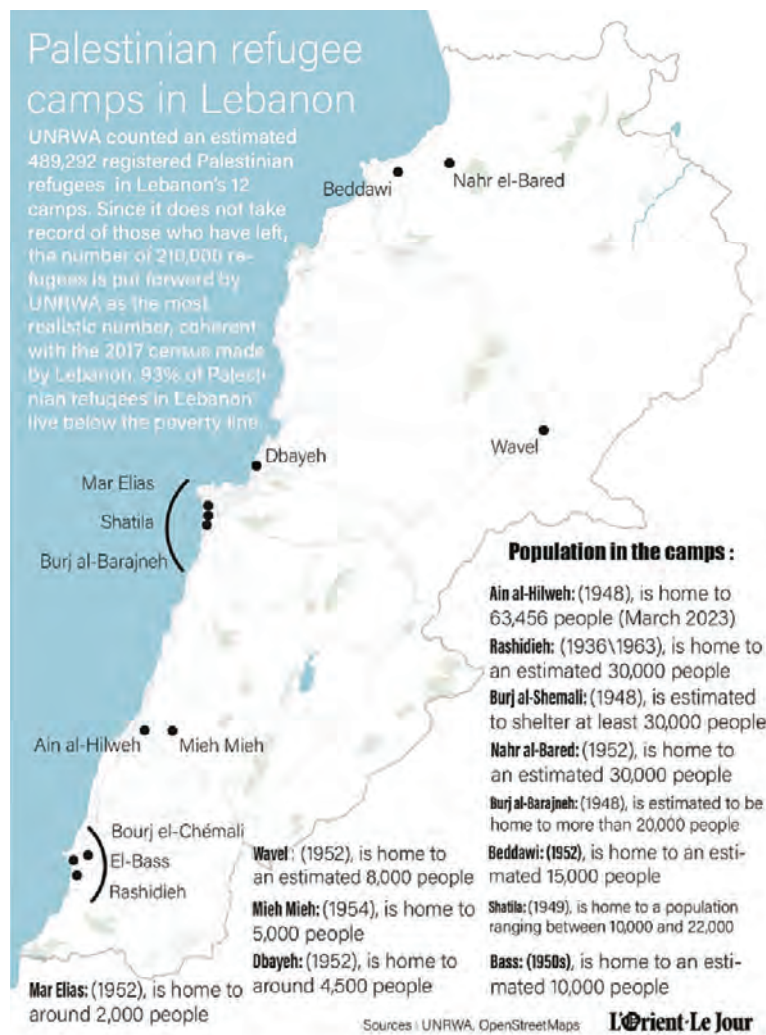


Central Administration of statistics - Lebanon

Lebanon has suffered from the Palestinian refugee crisis since 1948, and the recent Syrian refugee flow has further exacerbated the problem. Indeed, Lebanon could not sign the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Protocol was inadequate. Lebanon has always confirmed that Lebanon is not a final destination for refugees, an asylum nation, or a resettlement land. Thus, Lebanese authorities are treating all individuals who fled from Syria to Lebanon after March 2011 as “displaced”²⁶.

This research paper indicates that the substantial flow of Syrian refugees into the Lebanese homeland, accompanied by an increased level of Islamic radicalism, will facilitate the mission of the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in threatening the security and stability of Lebanon, and the effectiveness of the Lebanese state. Even though there is no evidence of the involvement of large numbers of refugees engaging in direct violence, their huge number and continuous inflow facilitates the transnational spread of weapons, fighters, and ideologies that could lead to future conflict. Refugees alter the balance among

26- Zeinab Cherri, Rafael Castro Delgado, and Pedro Arcos González, *The Lebanese Syrian Crisis: Impact of Influx of Syrian Refugees to an Already Weak State, Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, nb 9, 2016, p.165–172.



different socio-religious groups in the Lebanese population and aggravate economic competition. Local integration is an impractical solution.

The presence of Syrian refugees has also created security challenges for Lebanon, as some refugees have been involved in criminal activities, including drug trafficking and human smuggling. In addition, some refugees have been radicalized and recruited by extremist groups, which has raised concerns about the potential for terrorism. Extremists view Syrian refugees as an open field for recruitment and a more lucrative target than Palestinians in long-existing refugee camps.

The Lebanese government must take measures and address ways to limit the radicalized groups' recruitment opportunities, especially when there is no national counter-terrorism strategy. Added to the government's inability and the unwillingness of Lebanese society to assimilate the enormous number of Syrian refugees, this recruiting phenomenon could provide the Islamic State and violent extremist groups with a critical tool to destabilize Lebanon.



Chapter Three

Counter-Terrorism Public Policy

Counter-terrorism public policy refers to the measures taken by governments to prevent, detect, and respond to acts of terrorism. Effective counter-terrorism policies must balance the need to protect citizens from the threat of terrorism while respecting individual rights and freedoms.

Prevention is a key aspect of counter-terrorism public policy and involves identifying and addressing the root causes of terrorism. This may include addressing socio-economic grievances, improving border security, and disrupting the flow of funds and weapons to terrorist organizations. Preventive measures also include counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs aimed at dissuading individuals from joining terrorist groups and reintegrating former members back into society.

Detection is another critical aspect of counter-terrorism public policy, which involves the use of intelligence gathering and analysis to identify potential threats. This can include the use of technology such as facial recognition and biometrics, as well as human intelligence and analysis of open-source information. Effective information sharing between intelligence agencies, both domestically and internationally, is also crucial for detecting and preventing acts of terrorism.

Response is the final component of counter-terrorism public policy and involves the measures taken to respond to a terrorist attack and minimize its impact. This may include the deployment of emergency response teams, the implementation of lockdown procedures, and the provision of medical and psychological support to those affected. The response should also include investigations to bring the perpetrators to justice and prevent future attacks²⁷.

A comprehensive and effective counter-terrorism public policy is crucial in ensuring the safety and security of a nation and its citizens. It is a comprehensive approach to addressing the threat of terrorism, outlining

27- Thomas Renard, Counter-Terrorism Studies: A Glimpse at the Current State of Research ..., University of Leiden, August, 2021, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2021/issue-4/schmid-et-al.pdf>.

the government's strategy for preventing and responding to acts of terrorism²⁸:

1. Clarity of Purpose: A counter-terrorism public policy provides clarity on the government's approach to countering terrorism, outlining the goals and objectives of the policy and the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved in implementing it. This clarity of purpose helps to ensure that all relevant agencies are working towards the same goal, reducing the risk of confusion and conflicting priorities.

2. Improved Coordination: A well-structured counter-terrorism public policy provides a basis for interagency cooperation and coordination, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism. This improved coordination helps to avoid duplication of effort and ensures that all agencies are working together to achieve the best possible outcome.

3. Better Resource Allocation: A counter-terrorism public policy can also help to ensure that resources are allocated effectively to where they are needed most. This can help to improve the overall effectiveness of the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism, as resources are targeted to areas of greatest need.

4. Increased Public Trust and Confidence: A counter-terrorism public policy demonstrates the government's commitment to countering terrorism and can help to build public trust and confidence in the government's ability to protect citizens from acts of terrorism. This increased public trust and confidence can also help to maintain social stability and support for the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism.

5. International Cooperation: A well-structured counter-terrorism public policy can also provide a basis for international cooperation and participation in international counter-terrorism efforts. This international cooperation can help to improve the overall effectiveness of the global fight against terrorism, as nations work together to share information and resources.

28- Dina Mansour-Ille, Counterterrorism and the Risk of Over-Classification of Situations of ..., International Review of the Red Cross, 2021, <https://internationalreview.icrc.org/sites/default/files/reviews-pdf/2022-02/counterterrorism-and-risk-of-over-classification-916.pdf>.

6. Legal Framework: A counter-terrorism public policy can also provide a legal framework for the government's efforts to prevent and respond to terrorism, outlining the powers and responsibilities of relevant agencies and providing a basis for the development of counter-terrorism legislation.

7. Public Awareness: A counter-terrorism public policy can also play a crucial role in raising public awareness of the threat of terrorism and the steps that can be taken to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism. This increased public awareness can help to enhance public vigilance and reduce the risk of terrorism by promoting the reporting of suspicious activity. The year 2018 saw the release of Lebanon's national strategy for combating violent extremism (PVE). For the purpose of gathering ideas for a PVE national action plan (NAP) for the strategy's implementation, the National PVE Coordination Unit hosted a number of workshops in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic and delays in government formation in 2020 prevented the Cabinet from endorsing the NAP.

To counter the terrorist organization's threat to the security and stability of Lebanon, the Lebanese government is not conducting serious reforms to the Political Opportunity Structure to address the roots of the problem and not its symptoms. While the LAF is to be commended on its efforts to fight radical militants, military efforts alone will not effectively address local sectarian grievances. Lebanese authorities need to implement a national counter-terrorism public policy. Lebanon depends on the LAF to plan and execute this war on the operational level. Although the LAF is conducting all the necessary tasks to counter the threat of terrorism, there is a lack of support in materiel and manpower to raise the effectiveness of the fighting forces.

Conclusion

Lebanon will continue to face dangerous spillover threats from the existing sectarian tensions and refugee problem and the most complicated issue of the Islamic State threat to its internal security and stability as long as the Syrian Civil War and instability in the region persist. The international community must assist the Lebanese government to minimize these spillover effects that will threaten the stability of the whole Levant region for years to come. Military assistance to the Lebanese security forces is of great importance to face the imminent threat of the Islamic State insurgency and other terrorist organizations. The LAF has a critical role in securing the country, safeguarding the borders, and isolating Lebanon from regional instability.

The Lebanese government must also address the root causes of the current problem. Reducing inequality between parts of the country in terms of development, poverty, unemployment, and poor governance must be a priority for all efforts. The grievances of the affected population, with the rise of radicalization and the huge number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, constitute fertile ground for radical groups to exploit. A new response based on a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic approaches addresses the root causes and will provide a lasting solution to the current threat of terrorism.

The Islamic State terrorist organization is no longer the powerhouse it once was. However, the small number of survivors who weren't killed or imprisoned still attacks targets throughout the territories it once controlled and in neighboring countries like Lebanon. Earlier this year, information on the Lebanese perpetrators of the attacks began to appear in reports. Although the Islamic State has lost its strongholds on the northeastern borders, its threat to Lebanon goes beyond the control of territories to spreading its ideology, sleeper cells, and recruiting supporters.

The situation in Lebanon has been quite challenging since 2019, with a combination of economic, political, and social factors contributing to a general sense of instability. In October 2019, widespread protests erupted across the country in response to a proposed tax on WhatsApp calls. The



protests quickly grew to encompass a range of grievances, including corruption, political dysfunction, and economic inequality. The government eventually resigned in the face of public pressure, but it took months of political wrangling to form a new government.

Since then, the country has been grappling with a severe economic crisis, with a rapidly devaluing currency, skyrocketing inflation, and widespread poverty. The crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put further strain on the already overburdened healthcare system.

The political situation remains tense, with ongoing power struggles between different political factions and continued accusations of corruption. In August 2020, a massive explosion at the Port of Beirut killed over 200 people and caused widespread damage, further exacerbating the sense of instability and anger among the population.

The presence of Syrian refugees has also had a significant impact on Lebanon's security situation. Some refugees have been involved in criminal activities, including drug trafficking and human smuggling, which has raised concerns about public safety. In addition, some refugees have been radicalized and recruited by extremist groups, which has contributed to the threat of terrorism in the country. The influx of refugees has intensified sectarian tensions and has contributed to the polarization of Lebanese society. This has been further exacerbated by the involvement of various external actors in the Syrian conflict, which has led to increased political and military tensions in Lebanon.

Key Findings

This research paper analyzed the current Islamic State and other terrorist organizations' threat to Lebanese security and stability. This analysis helped to explore the different aspects of this threat: the scattered armed sleeper cells and lone wolves, the increase in sectarian tensions, the growth in radicalization, and the security threat that poses the huge number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. There is a problem due to the lack of political and socio-economic reforms and the growing crisis of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Thus, the research paper concludes with a new response that the Lebanese government must adopt to counter this threat.

In 2014, the Islamic State began to implement a formal expansion strategy through direct attacks inside Lebanon, threatening national security and stability. The Islamic State will continue to take advantage of the situation to create active sleeper cells, suicide bombings inside the country, and deliberate attacks on the Lebanese Armed Forces in order to destabilize the security environment and create chaos.

Even though there is no evidence of a massive involvement of refugees in direct violence, their presence in huge numbers facilitates the transnational spread of weapons, fighters, and ideologies that could lead to future conflict.

The policy should prioritize measures to counter terrorism financing and money laundering, as well as address the root causes of extremism and radicalization. This can be achieved through improved governance and the implementation of social, economic, and educational programs aimed at promoting tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for human rights.

Additionally, the policy should emphasize the importance of cooperation and coordination between the government and security forces, civil society organizations, and the international community. This includes information sharing, intelligence gathering, and training programs that support the capacity of security forces to effectively respond to terrorist threats.

The policy should also focus on the protection of critical infrastructure and ensuring the readiness of emergency response systems in the event of a terrorist attack. This includes enhancing physical and cyber security, as well

as developing contingency plans to ensure that essential services, such as healthcare and communications, remain operational.

The current response relies on a kinetic approach led by the Lebanese Armed Forces to fight the insurgency and counter the terrorist attacks of the sleeper cells inside the country and on the borders. The LAF is building up the right structures to strengthen the weak borders to deter and deny infiltration and support internal sleeper terrorist cells.

The measures the Lebanese government takes to deal with the current crisis have contributed to a limited solution because these do not address the root causes of the problem. A military solution with no social, political, and economic reforms will not lead to the desired end state of a secure and stable Lebanon. Indeed, it may worsen the current situation in the long run.

To adequately address the current problems, the government of Lebanon must adopt broad reforms in public and private sectors embedded in a counterterrorism public policy. It should also focus on a more human-security-centered approach to fighting terrorism.

While this proposed response will not lead to the final elimination of the threat because its source is from outside the border, it will disengage its possible relations with some of Lebanon's social components. It will also address the current security problem of repeated terrorist attacks and the threat of sleeper terrorist cells inside the country. The Lebanese government must entail additional measures to strengthen social cohesion and prevent sectarian tensions escalation, which proved its ability to dismantle societies.

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The Crossroads of Crisis: Terrorism, Refugees, and Public Policy in Lebanon

Brigadier General Elias Aad

مفترق طرق الأزمة: الإرهاب واللاجئون والسياسة العامة في لبنان

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تهدف الدراسة المعنونة «مفترق طرق الأزمة: الإرهاب واللاجئون والسياسة العامة في لبنان» إلى تسليط الضوء على التحديات الاستثنائية التي واجهها لبنان منذ استقلاله في العام 1943، ومنها العديد من النزاعات والأزمات في ظل تنوع النسيج الاجتماعي والثقافي للبلد. إن خطر تحوّل الصراعات الداخلية إلى صدامات يشكل تهديدًا دائمًا كون الحكم في لبنان يركز على نظام طائفي عماده التوافق على مختلف الشؤون لإدارة الانتظام العام. علاوة على ذلك، أدى تدفّق أكثر من مليون ونصف مليون نازح سوري إلى لبنان إلى زيادة التوترات وتهديد التوازن الداخلي الهش بين مختلف مكونات المجتمع اللبناني. وما يزيد الوضع تعقيدًا تصاعد التطرف الراديكالي العنيف ونشاط بعض المنظمات الإرهابية عبر خلاياها النائمة، إذ تشير هذه الدراسة، إلى أنّها ما زالت تشكل تهديدًا كبيرًا للبلاد والمنطقة بحدودها الأوسع. كما تستكشف الدراسة تأثير الإرهاب واللاجئين والسياسة العامة للدولة في لبنان، وتقدّم طرقًا للحفاظ على الأمن والاستقرار الداخلي. ومن النتائج التي توصلت إليها، أن الحكومة اللبنانية بحاجة إلى اعتماد سياسات عامة وتنفيذها بشكل فعّال لمكافحة الإرهاب ومواجهة التهديدات التي تشكلها الجماعات المتطرفة. وهي تخلص إلى أن الحالة في لبنان معقّدة وتتطلب نهجًا شاملًا يأخذ في عين الاعتبار الحقائق السياسية، الاجتماعية والاقتصادية للبلد وذلك لضمان السلم والاستقرار الدائمين.