

# Lebanese Army on the Offensive

Karin Leukefeld, Beirut<sup>1</sup>

## Jihadists are to be expelled from the territory bordering Syria

“It is good that the Lebanese army is now fighting against Daesh,” says Antranik Helvadjian, who has been leading an international bookstore in Beirut for more than 50 years. With “Daesh,” Helvadjian uses the Arabic abbreviation for the so-called “Islamic State,” although his native language is Armenian. “I do not understand why the West does not support Syria in this fight against Daesh. You see what has happened in Barcelona, these terrorists are coming at them.” That is exactly what Syrian President Bashar al-Assad predicted years ago. “If the West had supported Assad in the fight against Daesh from the beginning, you would not have to be afraid in Europe today.”

Antranik Helvadjian was born in the 1930s in Beirut. His parents had survived the massacre during the First World War in the Ottoman Empire and found a new home in Lebanon. The history of the Armenians, wars and the numerous Western interventions in the Middle East fill the shelves of his bookstore, as well as novels, illustrated books, travel books and cookbooks. The large assortment in Arabic, English and French opens valuable insights into politics and history, art and literature of the Arab world and the Middle East. Debate is conducted with strong coffee, and classical music in the background. “If Hezbollah had not supported Assad in his fight against Daesh,” he said, “we would have the terrorists here in Beirut today.”

The Syrian refugees had also been joined by Islamic fighters since 2012, which — with Lebanese supporters — were able to organize an infrastructure for supplies, supplies and medical care in accommodations and camps around the village of Arsal.

As early as April, 2012, the Lebanese army seized a ship in the port of Tripoli with weapons and ammunition destined for Syria. In 2014 explosive-laden vehicles from Arsal headed for Beirut and the army took up positions around the town.

The expulsion of the Islamists, however, goes to Hezbollah’s account, which then gave the liberated territory to the army. In Nusra Front armed camps, ground-to-air missiles (SAM) and US anti-tank missiles (TOWs) have been found. The Islamists had left them with large amounts of ammunition and guns during their flight. The fight against the last Daesh fighters is currently focused on Ras Baalbeck, north of Arsal.

Lebanese newspapers have been reporting in their front pages on the army offensive in the north-eastern border area to Syria. On Thursday, President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Saad Hariri discussed the deployment with army chief Joseph Aoun and the head of the military intelligence agency, Tony Mansour. In a detailed conversation

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with the “Politico” news portal, Hariri had previously affirmed military and political cooperation with Hezbollah, despite their well-known political differences.

“For the good of the country and its stability, the economy, and the 1.5 million refugees, we have to come to an agreement, otherwise it will be like Syria,” said Hariri. “We had a civil war, we paid a high price, 200,000 people were killed. From day one we should have sat down and looked for solutions.”

The US and Europe regard Hezbollah as a “terrorist organization,” although the party is represented with deputies in parliament and with ministers in the Lebanese government. At the beginning of August, Nikki Haley, the United States’ ambassador to the United Nations, warned that “Hezbollah’s weapons threatened the stability and security of the region.” In Europe, Hezbollah’s military arm is considered “terrorist.” But beyond the official declarations, European politicians and secret services often meet with Hezbollah leaders. They are considered well informed and reliable.

Source:

<https://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/1061162.libanesische-armee-in-der-offensive.html>