

# ***LEBANON: ONE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY TO RULE THEM ALL***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Since Michel Aoun's election as President of Lebanon, the General Directorate of General Security (GDGS) and its pro-Hezbollah head, Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, have gained influence. The President purged the Lebanese intelligence community of any potential adversary of Hezbollah's growing grip over the State's apparatus. This recent trend could lead to a national centralization of the intelligence community under the umbrella of the GDGS.*

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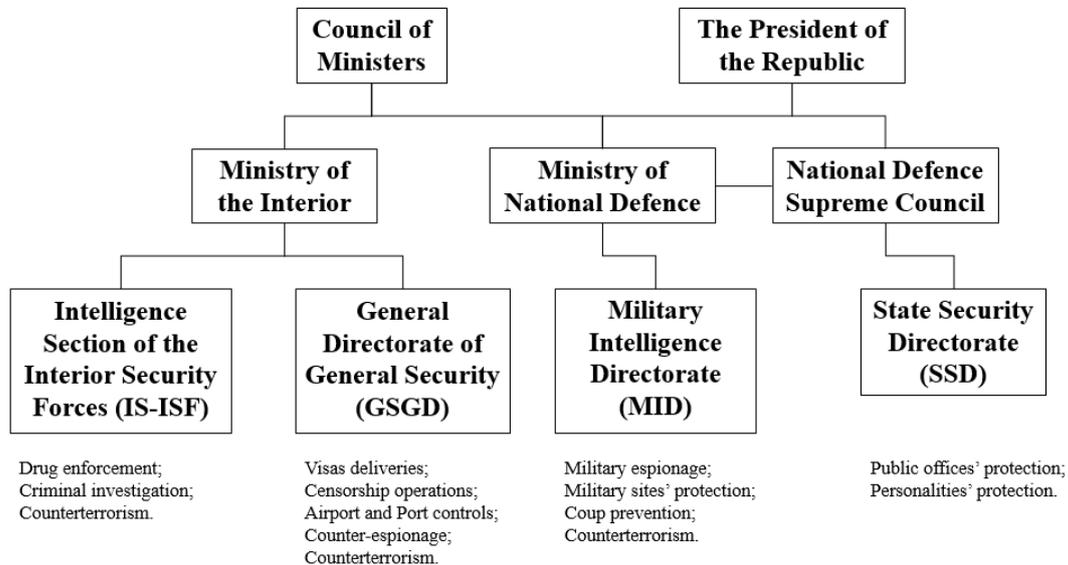
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## I. AOUN'S ELECTION AND THE LEBANESE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Michel Aoun's election as President of Lebanon (October 31, 2016) was unanimously described by local commentators and journalists as a step to Lebanon's stabilization after more than 10 years of political turmoil. For some, Aoun was the only major politician who could mitigate the growing tension between Lebanon's major political blocs: on the one hand, the all-powerful Shia Hezbollah, Aoun's political ally since 2005 and backbone of Damascus' survival and Iran's hegemon plans in the Middle East; on the other hand, the growing Lebanese Sunni militias anxious about both the defeat of their "brothers jihadists" in Syria and Hezbollah's grip on the Lebanese State. In intelligence matters and the State's security apparatus, President Aoun kept his promises to Hezbollah and took the side of the soon-to-be winner.

Lebanon has four intelligence services: the Intelligence Section of the interior Security Forces (IS-ISF), the General Directorate of General Security (GDGS), the Military Intelligence Directorate (MID) and the State Security Directorate (SSD):



## II. THE PURGE

Since his election, Aoun has purged the Lebanese intelligence community of any potential or actual contender of Hezbollah's growing influence in Lebanon.

Gen. Antoine Souleymane Mansour replaced Gen. Camil Daher at the head of Lebanon's Military Intelligence Directorate (MID). The latter was only in office for a year when the presidency replaced him with the Christian Beqaa-born Gen. Mansour who followed antiterrorism courses in the United States, in France and ... in Syria. For reminder, the Beqaa valley is one of Hezbollah's strongholds in Lebanon. The region is known to be Hezbollah's drug trafficking crossroad and a lot of the militia's weapons depots are buried there.

Gen. Daher had taken part in the *Donas* negotiations, a contract by which Saudi Arabia was going to offer Lebanon \$3 billion worth of French weapons. The contract was never signed and Saudi Arabia ended by buying the French weapons for its own military forces. Gen. Daher also paid the price of his close relationship to the former Chief of Staff, Gen. Jean Kahwaji, Aoun's unofficial contender to the Presidency.

Gen. George Karaa, head of the State Security Directorate (SSD), was replaced by Gen. Tony Saliba and Gen. Abdou Faddoul, head of the SSD's secret funds, was forced to retire. According to some security sources, the reasons of Gen. Karaa's replacement was his "good work" in the investigation of Hezbollah's illegal telecommunication system in 2008. In July 2014, Gen. Karaa was the target of a harsh media campaign in the columns of the pro-Hezbollah journal *Al-Akhbar*. Politicians were surprised to read some quotes of Gen. Karaa in the journal even though he never gave any interview. This was not a problem for *Al-Akhbar* since it could count on Gen. Karaa's pro-Iranian second in command, Gen. Mohammad Toufaili, for any "juicy" inside story.



Tony Saliba, Head of the State Security Directorate

### III. THE LONE SURVIVOR: GEN. ABBAS IBRAHIM

The only spared intelligence agency was the General Directorate of General Security (GDGS) and its powerful head, Gen. Abbas Ibrahim. The latter is backed by Hezbollah and became its "dirty jobs" man. On June 12, 2016, a bomb exploded next to Blom Bank's HQ in Beirut. This explosion took place only a few days after the adoption by the bank of the new Hizbullah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA) rules (2015). The message and its author were clear: Hezbollah would not tolerate any serious banking restrictions in Lebanon. After 4 days of tensions between the pro and anti-Hezbollah blocs, Gen. Ibrahim announced in an interview that "the conflict between Hezbollah and the banking system was behind us". Indeed, he acted as Hezbollah's middleman and negotiated a new strategy for the Lebanese banks to implement the HIFPA without targeting Hezbollah's key banking assets. The militia was pleased.

The other Hezbollah commanded work was Gen. Ibrahim's multiple trilateral negotiations between the GDGS, ISIS and *Al-Nosra* cells and Hezbollah in the north-eastern parts of Lebanon. Since 2016, no less than three GSGD-Hezbollah-Jihadists deals were concluded and led to the transfer of Sunni terrorists to Syria, under Hezbollah and the Syrian army protection. Hezbollah described such deals as "victories for Lebanon".

The European Union seems to acquiesce to this pro-Hezbollah *fait accompli*. In February 2017, the EU made a call for tenders to donate a certain amount of materials to "the Lebanese intelligence community". However, the GSGD was the main beneficiary: it was promised millions of euros in intelligence equipment, including some very sophisticated tools of media and social



Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, Head of the General Directorate of General Security

network monitoring... The other agencies were promised less efficient tools. The MID would receive some border control tools and the Interior Forces Intelligence Division some training programs of “only” 1.3 million euros.

#### *IV. THE FUTURE OF LEBANON'S INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES*

The recent developments in the Lebanese intelligence community may be the start of a centralization policy of the intelligence community. Before the 1975-1990 civil war, the Military Second Bureau (MSB) was an all-powerful and centralized intelligence agency, taking care of defence issues and political internal affairs (changing election results, deciding who could run for elections, etc.). The GDGS could become the new MSB. Some legal changes in the security apparatus are to be expected before Aoun's end of term.