Beirut and, by the eve of 1975, the large and increasingly militant Palestinian presence in Lebanon became a central issue dividing the Lebanese. Palestinian latitude of action in Lebanon played directly into the debate of 1943: Lebanon's identity and role in the region and the extent of its regional obligations. By the 1970s, however, this previously ideological debate assumed very real consequences as the PLO developed a "state-within-a-state" in Lebanon and Lebanese territory became an arena for Israeli "retaliatory" raids.

Conservative Christian elements -- most notably those groups in the Lebanese Front -- considered Palestinian actions as a threat to Lebanon's security and sovereignty. Other Lebanese -- in particular those groups of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) -- aligned themselves with Palestinian organizations. The domestic debate polarized and, as the regional situation turned increasingly volatile, every *fedayeen* action from and Israeli reprisal onto Lebanese territory became confessionally exploited.

While not denying the domestic problems that contributed to the war, many participants pointed out that external actors also played a major detrimental role right from the start.[16]

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[16] For example, one participant said that Sulieman Frangieh was advised by conservative Arab states to create and finance Lebanese militias to fight the Palestinians: because the Palestinians were considered to be the embodiment of Arab nationalism, no Arab government could declare support for Lebanese **government** actions against the Palestinians. But they could support the idea of Lebanese **groups** fighting the Palestinians (because the struggle would be cast in popular terms).