



## THE HEZBOLLAH FRONT OF THE IRAN WAR AND POTENTIAL ISRAEL-LEBANON TALKS

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Earlier this month, Hezbollah joined the Iran war in solidarity with the Iranian regime – its chief benefactor. The group renewed strikes against Israel, which derailed negotiations between the new Lebanese leadership and Israeli government. Israel responded by launching major new operations in Lebanon. The ongoing war has already resulted in more than 1,000 deaths in Lebanon and residents of northern Israel are back in the bomb shelters. As Israel appears poised to launch a full-scale ground invasion of Lebanon, and its Defense Minister [vows](#) to flatten Lebanese border villages per the “Gaza model,” this issue brief lays out the current situation and outlines why an Israeli military invasion would harm all of the key actors in the region and squander the historic diplomatic opening between Beirut and Jerusalem.

### Hezbollah Remains Intact After Gaza War

On the day after the October 7 Hamas massacre in southern Israel, Hezbollah joined the ensuing war “[in solidarity](#)” with Hamas. The fighting between Israel and Hezbollah lasted until a ceasefire took effect on November 27, 2024. During these 13 months, Israel launched its sixth invasion of Lebanon since 1978, killed Hezbollah’s secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, and targeted Hezbollah with thousands of exploding pagers and walkie-talkies. Lebanon saw more than [3,700](#) casualties, while 45 Israeli civilians and 73 IDF soldiers were killed. Almost 900,000 people were displaced in Lebanon and some 60,000 people evacuated their homes in northern Israel.

Israel’s primary objectives during the 2023-2024 conflict with Hezbollah were threefold: (1) return Israeli residents to the north, (2) push Hezbollah away from the border area, and (3) degrade Hezbollah’s military capabilities. By the November 2024 ceasefire, many evacuees had not returned to northern Israel, Hezbollah had not completely withdrawn north of the Litani River, and Hezbollah continued to threaten Israel’s north. Israel managed to reduce the intensity of Hezbollah’s attacks in the short-term, kill many of its members, and inflict serious damage to its infrastructure and stockpiles, but did not fundamentally eliminate Hezbollah’s long-term missile or drone threat.

### 2024 Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire Agreement

After 13 months of fighting, the US and France brokered an [agreement](#) between Israel and Lebanon. The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to UN Security Council [Resolution 1701](#), which ended the 2006 Lebanon war. They agreed to stop trading cross-border fire, remove Hezbollah military presence and infrastructure south of Litani, and expand deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to southern Lebanon in parallel with a phased Israeli military withdrawal from the area. The parties later agreed to [extend](#) the 60-day ceasefire to February 18, 2025, at which time the IDF had withdrawn from most of southern Lebanon while [maintaining](#) five military outposts there. Between November 2024 and February 2025, both sides repeatedly violated the ceasefire agreement, with [near-daily](#) IDF attacks on Lebanon and Hezbollah actively [rebuilding and rearming](#).

## Hezbollah Joins the Iran War

On March 2, in response to the US-Israeli decision last month to initiate war against Iran and assassinate Ali Khamenei, Hezbollah [opened](#) another warfront by resuming its rocket attacks on Israel. Israel responded with strikes. At least [1,000 people](#) have already been killed in Lebanon, thousands more have been injured, and one million have been [displaced](#). One Israeli [civilian](#) and two Israeli [soldiers](#) have been killed. Roughly 13 percent of Lebanon is under Israeli [forced displacement](#) and [mass evacuation](#) orders, compelled by Israel to move northward. On Sunday, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz [ordered](#) the IDF to accelerate home demolitions along the border – “in line with the model we applied in Gaza’s Rafah and Beit Hanoun.”

IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir [said](#) recently that the Israeli military campaign has “only just begun,” as [fears grow](#) of another full-scale Israeli ground invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. Indeed, Katz [announced](#) today that Israel will maintain control of southern Lebanon up to the Litani. Far-right Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich went further by [proposing](#) that the Litani replace the Blue Line (the de facto Israel-Lebanon border) as the new border. Perhaps even more worryingly, on the other side of the political spectrum, Israeli President Isaac Herzog (formerly of the Labor party) is [advocating](#) for IDF “strategic depth” in Lebanon.

## Another Israeli Invasion of Lebanon Looms

After an Israeli strike damaged the Qasmiye bridge, one of the main routes linking south and central Lebanon, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun [called](#) the attack a “prelude to a ground invasion.” Aoun further [warned](#) that IDF attacks on [civilian infrastructure](#) are “an attempt to sever the geographical connection between the southern Litani region and the rest of Lebanese territory.” Israel has also unlawfully deployed [white phosphorus](#) in residential areas and has [struck](#) Lebanese [healthcare workers](#), medical facilities, and first responders. This escalation is leading to growing Lebanese concerns that Israel could yet again occupy the country, reminiscent of the nearly two decades of Israeli occupation that ended when the IDF withdrew from Lebanon in 2000.

The 1982 invasion effectively produced Hezbollah and a repeat occupation would only bolster it. Another full-scale invasion and [permanent occupation](#) would provide greater legitimacy to Hezbollah, boosting its resistance narrative at a time when support for the group is [declining](#) within Lebanese society. The Lebanese people are increasingly frustrated by Hezbollah dragging the country into wars – on behalf of Hamas in 2023 and now on Iran’s behalf – and are exhausted from all the explosions and evacuations. Israel’s relentless attacks [threaten](#) to further undermine the Lebanese government, perceived as weak in confronting both Israel and Hezbollah, and push the disaffected back into the arms of the Iran-backed Shia militant group as the only “true” protector against Israeli aggression. If Israel continues to pursue the morally bankrupt and grossly misguided “Gaza model” in Lebanon, it will squander a historic diplomatic [opening](#) with the new leadership in Beirut and bury any chance for an eventual Israel-Lebanon peace.

## New Leadership in Beirut and Defeating Hezbollah

In January 2025, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam came to power, changing the political landscape of the country. Aoun and Salam are committed to disarming Hezbollah and have repeatedly expressed an openness to negotiate with Israel. In August 2025, the Lebanese government adopted the “[National Shield](#)” (Dir al-Watan) plan, a five-phase roadmap to disarm Hezbollah – [informed](#) by an earlier US proposal and [buttressed](#) by a \$230 million US investment in the LAF. However, it is an open question whether this new government can succeed in ultimately disarming Hezbollah.

The Lebanese army [announced](#) in January that it completed the first phase of its Hezbollah disarmament plan, claiming to have taken control south of the Litani. This claim has since been undermined by Hezbollah’s March 2nd resumption of strikes against Israel from southern Lebanon. In February, the LAF [announced](#) a four-month timeline for completing the second phase of the plan, which concerns the area between the Litani and Awali rivers. US Central Command [confirmed](#) last year that the LAF had successfully removed approximately 10,000 of Hezbollah’s rockets, 400 missiles, and 205,000 unexploded ordnance fragments.

Despite this initial progress, Hezbollah is relying on its sustained links to Iran and strong domestic foundations to make a comeback. Hezbollah has managed relatively quickly to *partially* reconstitute its arsenal, restore its command structure, and refinance – demonstrating the futility of Israel’s narrow military approach. Hezbollah is not just a paramilitary force, it also has considerable political and financial power in Lebanon. Permanently defeating Hezbollah will therefore require a more holistic approach that combines military disarmament with careful diplomacy, targeted sanctions, and support for the new leadership in Beirut, state institutions, and the Lebanese people.

## Prospects for Israel-Lebanon Peace

**Lebanese Olive Branch:** Back in December, Lebanon and Israel held their [first direct talks](#) in forty years, which have been derailed by the ongoing violence. On March 9, President Aoun [called](#) for a resumption of negotiations, while also accusing Hezbollah of betraying his country by joining the Iran war. Prime Minister Salam repeated this call last week, [declaring](#) that “we are ready for negotiations with Israel” and pleading for US intervention. He also [lamented](#) that Hezbollah has rendered Lebanon “a battlefield of the war between Israel and Iran.” On Sunday, the Lebanese prime minister [reiterated](#) that “we have dropped the idea of prohibiting talks with Israel.” The US [welcomed](#) this outreach to Israel, but appeared to cast doubt on the possibility of negotiations during wartime. Meanwhile, Netanyahu [reportedly](#) tapped his longtime aide, former Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, to lead negotiations with Lebanon, though it appears for now that Israel has [rebuffed](#) Lebanon’s offer to resume talks.

**French Plan:** By contrast, Lebanon has accepted a new French ceasefire [proposal](#) as a basis for negotiations with Israel. France is now [engaged](#) in shuttle diplomacy between Beirut and Jerusalem to help bring the parties back to the negotiating table. The French plan would require Lebanon to recognize Israel, IDF withdrawal from Lebanon, LAF redeployment to southern Lebanon, and Hezbollah disarmament – including a verification mechanism involving the UN

Security Council and UN Interim Force in Lebanon. France also proposed that Israel and Lebanon begin the process of ending the formal state of war that began at Israel's founding.

**Historic Opportunity:** This [grand bargain](#) of Lebanese recognition for Israeli withdrawal is an historic opportunity that must not be wasted. Former Israeli Air Force Chief [Nimrod Sheffer](#) and former IDF Deputy Chief of Staff and head of the Democrats party [Yair Golan](#) are both [making the case](#) for diplomacy over war on Israel's northern front. Long-term stability on this front can be achieved "only by effective co-operation between Israel and the Lebanese government," [said](#) former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. After two years of war in Gaza and with the Iran war spreading regionwide, the Middle East is [ripe for change](#). Like in Beirut, new leadership has emerged in Damascus that supports [rapprochement](#) with Israel and disarming Hezbollah. The deposed Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, an ally of the Islamic Republic, was replaced in 2024 by President Ahmed al-Sharaa, whose government is [preventing](#) the smuggling of Iranian arms to Hezbollah via the Syrian-Lebanese border.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- **The United States** should heed the call from the new Lebanese leadership and push for an immediate cessation of hostilities. It should commit to a sustained diplomatic effort to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. The US should consider expanding its \$230 million investment in Lebanon to boost the Lebanese economy, state institutions, and the legitimacy of the new leadership. The Trump Administration is right to be [lobbying](#) allies to designate Hezbollah a terrorist organization and to be imposing additional [sanctions](#) on the group. At the same time, the administration must ensure that military aid to Israel is not being used by the IDF against Lebanese civilians.
- **Israel** must cease its relentless attacks on Lebanese civilian infrastructure and its use of white phosphorus in residential areas. Instead of providing fodder to Hezbollah, the Israeli government should commit to a phased IDF withdrawal from Lebanon in parallel with LAF redeployment to the Southern Litani Area. Israel should work with the new Lebanese leadership, in conjunction with the US, UN, and other partners, on a holistic approach to verified disarmament and permanent defeat of Hezbollah. Israel should also accept the olive branch extended by Lebanon and return to the negotiating table.
- **Lebanon** must not retract its olive branch to Israel, despite current Israeli intransigence. The Lebanese government should redouble efforts to disarm Hezbollah and rid the country of Iran's malign influence. Beirut's [announcement](#) today that it expelled the Iranian ambassador, declaring him persona non grata, is a step in the right direction – as is the government's recent move to [deport](#) members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Lebanon must also commit additional troops south of the Litani and allow the US, UN, and Israel to verify progress on its five-phase disarmament plan. In addition to pursuing a monopoly on arms, the government should extend its [ban](#) on Hezbollah's military activities to the political and financial realms. Through effective governance, improved economic management, and strategic engagement with Israel, the new leadership in Beirut can restore confidence in state institutions, heal sectarian divisions, and undermine Hezbollah's legitimacy.