

# A Fragile Opening for Peace Between Lebanon and Israel

by [Hanin Ghaddar \(/experts/hanin-ghaddar\)](/experts/hanin-ghaddar), [Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](/experts/robert-satloff), [Ehud Yaari \(/experts/ehud-yaari\)](/experts/ehud-yaari)

Nov 10, 2025

*Also published in Washington Post*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### [Hanin Ghaddar \(/experts/hanin-ghaddar\)](/experts/hanin-ghaddar)

Hanin Ghaddar is the Friedmann Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute's Rubin Family Arab Politics Program, where she focuses on Shia politics throughout the Levant.



### [Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](/experts/robert-satloff)

Robert Satloff is the Segal Executive Director of The Washington Institute, a post he assumed in January 1993.



### [Ehud Yaari \(/experts/ehud-yaari\)](/experts/ehud-yaari)

Ehud Yaari is the Lafer International Fellow at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

## With Lebanon's leaders hinting at reconciliation, U.S. pressure can help turn words into action.

**W**hile all eyes are on Gaza to see if the shaky ceasefire will hold, a more durable Arab-Israeli peace pact might come from an unexpected quarter: Lebanon. For the first time in decades, talking about peace is no longer taboo in Beirut. The country is having a serious national conversation about a topic once mentioned only in whispers.

That's the result of two key factors. First, Israel's drubbing of Hezbollah last year convinced a broad swath of the Lebanese public that only reconciliation with Israel could put an end to the violence that has pummeled the country for the past four decades. Second, the Trump administration's emphasis on regional peacemaking, as seen in President Donald Trump's commitment to [expanding the Abraham Accords \(https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/10/13/trump-peace-gaza-israel-negotiations/\)](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/10/13/trump-peace-gaza-israel-negotiations/), made the

possibility of peace with Israel seem real.

It's notable that in his otherwise bellicose speech to the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 26, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu [extended an olive branch to Lebanon](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/netanyahu-upbeat-on-peace-with-syria-lebanon-says-victory-over-hamas-will-enable-dramatic-expansion-of-abraham-accords/) ([https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/netanyahu-upbeat-on-peace-with-syria-lebanon-says-victory-over-hamas-will-enable-dramatic-expansion-of-abraham-accords/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/netanyahu-upbeat-on-peace-with-syria-lebanon-says-victory-over-hamas-will-enable-dramatic-expansion-of-abraham-accords/)). While making clear that Beirut needs to take “genuine and sustained action to disarm Hezbollah,” Netanyahu outlined a future of Israel-Lebanon peace under the umbrella of an Abraham Accords expansion.

Earlier that same week, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun began his own General Assembly speech [by declaring](https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/en/politics/811180/president-aoun-s-address-to-un-general-assembly-we) (<https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/en/politics/811180/president-aoun-s-address-to-un-general-assembly-we>), “I stand before you today talking about peace.” In mid-October, after the Gaza ceasefire and President Trump’s triumphant visit to the region, Aoun said his country and Israel [need to negotiate](https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-israel-ceasefire-hezbollah-germany-bd6c573d958eba9036841f6700ed1789) (<https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-israel-ceasefire-hezbollah-germany-bd6c573d958eba9036841f6700ed1789>). Shortly thereafter, he urged indirect talks with Israel, [noting that his country](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/10/13/lebanon-s-president-calls-for-negotiations-with-israel_6746379_4.html) ([https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/10/13/lebanon-s-president-calls-for-negotiations-with-israel\\_6746379\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/10/13/lebanon-s-president-calls-for-negotiations-with-israel_6746379_4.html)) “cannot be outside the current path in the region, which is the path of crisis resolution.” Even Prime Minister Nawaf Salam [has floated](https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-856144) (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-856144>) the idea of peace with Israel, as long as it is pursued alongside the creation of a Palestinian state.

The Trump administration seems to have noticed. In his speech last month before the Israeli Knesset in Jerusalem, [Trump said](https://rollcall.com/factbase/trump/transcript/donald-trump-speech-knesset-jerusalem-israel-october-13-2025/) (<https://rollcall.com/factbase/trump/transcript/donald-trump-speech-knesset-jerusalem-israel-october-13-2025/>), “My administration is actively supporting the new president of Lebanon and his mission to permanently disarm Hezbollah’s terror brigades.” He added another nod to Aoun: “He’s doing very well...Good things are happening there, really good things.”

The main obstacle blocking the leap from rhetoric to peacemaking is Hezbollah and its radical Shiite allies. Even in its weakened state, Hezbollah remains armed and dangerous, able to cow moderate political forces in the country and finance the rebuilding of its arsenal. Disarming Hezbollah is the main prerequisite for peace.

But Lebanon’s leaders have signaled their reluctance to use the full power of the state and the army to implement Hezbollah’s disarmament. This hesitancy might become especially apparent after Jan. 1, when, according to the Lebanese government’s [disarmament plan](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/without-hezbollah-disarmament-deadline-lebanon-should-face-repercussions) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/without-hezbollah-disarmament-deadline-lebanon-should-face-repercussions>), the focus should turn to Hezbollah’s weapons north of the Litani River. If disarmament remains stalled then, Israel will be far more likely to launch an operation to complete the mission itself, as U.S. envoy Tom Barrack [recently warned](https://x.com/usambturkiye/status/1980139041724190877?s=48) (<https://x.com/usambturkiye/status/1980139041724190877?s=48>).

One way to avert a catastrophic return to war would be for Lebanon and Israel to begin their own peace process. Movement on normalization would not substitute for disarmament. But if diplomacy were pursued as an alternative to Israeli military action against Hezbollah, the very fact of the talks would undermine Hezbollah’s effort to claw back its political influence. And practical progress could show the Lebanese people the potential benefits of peacemaking.

For now, Lebanese leaders appear to be linking their own willingness to negotiate to an end of the Gaza war and a pathway to Palestinian statehood before considering normalizing ties with Israel. Lebanon’s leaders also resent Israel’s continued control of several positions inside Lebanese territory. But the risk of another round of disastrous warfare might be enough for Aoun and Salam to consider putting Lebanese national interests first and trying diplomacy with Israel.

The Trump administration should do more to get things going. Special envoy Steve Witkoff could push to enlist America's key Arab partners to encourage the Lebanese to begin negotiations with Israel untethered from the Palestinian question. At the same time, the U.S. should incentivize Beirut to negotiate by offering help to Lebanon's desperate economy, which has **shrunk by nearly 40 percent** (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/06/19/fragile-stabilization-fuels-growth-in-lebanon>) since 2019. All international reconstruction aid and investment should be linked to the Lebanese government taking incremental peacemaking steps, such as properly demarcating borders, coordinating on water management and energy supplies, and repealing Lebanon's **counterproductive anti-normalization laws** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/anti-normalization-laws-powerful-weapon-fight-against-peace>) banning contact with Israeli citizens.

Finally, the administration should remind Lebanon that choosing to neither disarm Hezbollah nor pursue diplomacy with Israel will come with costs. Those could entail losing U.S. aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces, losing U.S. backing of international support for Lebanon's economy and losing U.S. willingness to restrain Israel from disarming Hezbollah "the hard way."

To be sure, even incremental steps toward peace will be an uphill climb in a country long dominated by Iran's chief regional proxy. But there is a rare opening to explain to ordinary Lebanese the benefits that could come from diplomacy with Israel. With all the complications on the Gaza front, maybe Lebanon-Israel peace will give Trump another shot at that Nobel Prize.

*Hanin Ghaddar is the Friedmann Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute. Robert Satloff is the Institute's Segal Executive Director and Howard P. Berkowitz Chair in U.S. Middle East Policy. Ehud Yaari is the Institute's Lafer International Fellow. This article was originally published [on the Washington Post website](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/11/10/lebanon-israel-peace-negotiations-trump/) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/11/10/lebanon-israel-peace-negotiations-trump/>). ❖*

---

## RECOMMENDED

---



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Prospects for Iraq-Syria Security Cooperation in a Post-Assad World](#)

Nov 7, 2025

◆  
Mohanad Faris

(/policy-analysis/prospects-iraq-syria-security-cooperation-post-assad-world)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## Sharaa on Trump's Five Points, Six Months On

Nov 7, 2025



Andrew J. Tabler

(/policy-analysis/sharaa-trumps-five-points-six-months)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## Sharaa Goes to Washington

Nov 7, 2025



James Jeffrey,

Michael Herzog,

Michael Jacobson,

Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/sharaa-goes-washington)

### TOPICS

Arab & Islamic Politics (/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics)

Arab-Israeli Relations (/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations)

Democracy & Reform (/policy-analysis/democracy-reform)

Peace Process (/policy-analysis/peace-process)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-analysis/israel)

Lebanon (/policy-analysis/lebanon)