

# Salvaging the Lebanon Ceasefire Amid Looming Deadlines and Threats of War

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Brief Analysis

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**Washington and its allies are waiting for Beirut to acknowledge the difficult but unavoidable truth: that war will resume unless serious action is taken to target all the pillars of Hezbollah's power, bolster Shia political alternatives, and otherwise satisfy the ceasefire's most important requirement: disarming the group.**

**A**lthough major military operations between Israel and Hezbollah ended in November 2024, the ceasefire agreement they reached at the time remains tenuous in multiple senses. For one, Israeli fire has hardly ceased; its forces are still conducting focused operations against Hezbollah targets nearly every day. This is because Israel's chief war goal—removing the terrorist threat on its northern border so that evacuated residents can safely return home—is still unattained. If Lebanon fails to meet its obligations, Israel is resolved to enforce this goal itself.

Under last year's deal, Beirut agreed to disarm Hezbollah via a mechanism carried out by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and monitored by the United States and France. Recognizing that this effort would be difficult and lengthy, Washington also acknowledged Israel's right to remove threats by force in the interim as necessary. The process began well enough—with support from the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the LAF deployed to the south, made progress in dismantling Hezbollah military infrastructure there, and submitted a plan for completing the rest of the mission in phases: south of the Litani River by the end of 2025, and then throughout other parts of the

country. Yet the bulk of the proposed disarmament process did not have a defined [timetable](#)

[\(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/without-hezbollah-disarmament-deadline-lebanon-should-face-repercussions\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/without-hezbollah-disarmament-deadline-lebanon-should-face-repercussions), and further problems soon arose, including Hezbollah threats of civil war.

Today, Israeli [reports \(https://www.ynetnews.com/article/r1ninqujwg\)](https://www.ynetnews.com/article/r1ninqujwg) indicate that the group is not disarming—in fact, Hezbollah efforts to rebuild its military capabilities have accelerated, including in the south. Similarly, LAF pledges to disarm militias in Palestinian refugee camps have resulted in mostly [performative steps \(https://israel-alma.org/palestinians-refugee-camps-in-lebanon-disarmament/\)](https://israel-alma.org/palestinians-refugee-camps-in-lebanon-disarmament/) so far. In response, Western officials have given Beirut multiple warnings about looming Israeli military escalation, while a U.S. delegation [recently gave \(https://www.al-akhbar.com/lebanon/869461/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%83-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9---6-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B7-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8\)](https://www.al-akhbar.com/lebanon/869461/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%83-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9---6-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B7-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8) LAF leaders until year's end to resume the process of disarming Hezbollah and cutting off the militia's cash flow or else face sanctions and more isolation from international banking systems and markets. The Trump administration also signaled its dissatisfaction by canceling LAF commander Gen. Rudolph Haykal's planned meetings in Washington last month. Meanwhile, Israel's message to Lebanon has been clear: the ceasefire agreement may soon collapse unless the situation changes.

## Israel's Goals and Priorities

**A**longside the mounting diplomatic pressure, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are maintaining military pressure via focused airstrikes and occasional ground raids, [reportedly \(https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-says-israel-has-killed-127-civilians-in-lebanon-since-ceasefire-with-hezbollah/\)](https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-says-israel-has-killed-127-civilians-in-lebanon-since-ceasefire-with-hezbollah/) killing around 350 Hezbollah members and destroying hundreds of other targets over the past year. Some of these targets were attacked after the LAF was informed about them but failed to take action.

The IDF has stepped up the pace and scope of such strikes in recent weeks, including operations in various southern Lebanese villages, an attack on a Hamas training facility in the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp that killed thirteen members of the group, and a strike on senior Hezbollah commander Haitham al-Tabatabai in Beirut's Dahiya district. The IDF then raised its alert level on the northern border in case Hezbollah chooses to respond forcefully, though the group has refrained so far, perhaps fearing that Israel is trying to draw it into conflict. Besides degrading Hezbollah's military capabilities and thwarting its reconstruction efforts, these strikes are intended to demonstrate Israel's resolve, motivate the Lebanese government to meet its obligations, and clarify that Hezbollah's only alternative to voluntary disarmament is renewed conflict with the IDF.

Moreover, the IDF still maintains a presence on five Lebanese hills overlooking Israeli border communities, thereby preventing Hezbollah from re-entrenching itself there and once again threatening Israelis. This posture and associated public [statements \(https://apnews.com/article/mideast-wars-israel-lebanon-hezbollah-withdraw-53e399dc2aee8800af729218edd3d3c5\)](https://apnews.com/article/mideast-wars-israel-lebanon-hezbollah-withdraw-53e399dc2aee8800af729218edd3d3c5) have made clear that Israeli forces will not withdraw until Beirut fulfills its duty to disarm Hezbollah.

Israel has also prohibited the reconstruction of certain southern villages that were destroyed after the group turned them into military compounds. Notably, the LAF has recently [refused \(https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-pushes-lebanon-army-search-more-intrusively-hezbollah-arms-sources-say-2025-11-10/\)](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-pushes-lebanon-army-search-more-intrusively-hezbollah-arms-sources-say-2025-11-10/) to enter so-called "private properties" in search of illicit weapons, even though wartime revelations proved beyond a doubt that Hezbollah had systematically turned such properties into military sites and [barred LAF/UNIFIL access \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/future-unifil-and-hezbollah-disarmament\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/future-unifil-and-hezbollah-disarmament) there for years.

# Lebanon's Goals and Priorities

Given Lebanon's divisive sectarian politics, imminent parliamentary election (currently scheduled for May), and lack of strong state institutions or dominant security forces, its leaders appear unwilling to take further steps that might increase the possibility of escalation with Hezbollah. Their main narrative rests on three main points: that pressing Hezbollah to disarm might spark a civil war and divide the LAF; that Lebanese forces are not capable of disarming the group nationwide; and that Beirut does not want to do the job for Israel, implying that Israel needs to do the job itself.

This narrative conveniently ignores Lebanon's agreed obligations under the ceasefire—a concern exacerbated by the fact that both General Haykal and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam have recently begun using the word “**containment** (<https://www.thebeiruter.com/article/salam%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9Ccontainment%E2%80%9D-of-hezbollah%E2%80%99s-arms-sparks-controversy/598>)” instead of “disarmament” when referring to LAF efforts north of Litani, echoing the failed appeasement policies that past governments adopted toward Hezbollah. Despite official calls for broader **negotiations** (<https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2025/11/22/aoun-says-lebanon-ready-for-negotiations-to-reach-an-agreement-that-would-end-israeli-strikes/>) with Israel and high-profile Lebanese media **tours** (<https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/5214016-lebanese-army-shows-its-efforts-imposing-state-monopoly-over-arms-rules-out>) of “exposed” Hezbollah tunnels, neither Beirut nor the LAF has taken serious action to disarm the group outside the southern border zone.

If the situation remains unchanged once the new year arrives and Washington's sixty-day ultimatum expires, Lebanon will probably face a different reality—one that entails more targeted killings of Hezbollah military and political leaders as well as more evacuations from densely populated centers of Hezbollah activity like Dahiya. Israel has also accused certain LAF figures of coordinating with the group, raising the possibility that it might add them to the target list in future rounds of escalation. At the same time, U.S. officials may decide to withdraw funding and other support for the LAF if it refuses to implement the ceasefire agreement. In other words, if Beirut does not act now, it may soon find itself less able to exert its sovereignty on crucial national security matters related to Hezbollah.

# Hezbollah's Goals and Priorities

For now, the group's main goal is survival. More specifically, Hezbollah needs to maintain four pillars of domestic power in order to rebuild its capabilities against Israel:

**The military pillar.** During the war, the group lost thousands of fighters, much of its military arsenal and infrastructure, and much of its command structure. Even as Hezbollah replaces these senior figures, the IDF has continued to attack them, keeping the leadership in disarray while reminding them of Israel's deep intelligence penetration. According to sources close to Hezbollah's military command, the group has also focused on cheap, in-house arms production, importing materials and building drones locally under the supervision of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. These same sources say that due to the drastic deterioration in Hezbollah's senior echelons, the IRGC is now leading the process of rebuilding the group's weapons and command structure.

**The financial pillar.** According to **U.S. officials** (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-official-iran-funneled-some-1-billion-to-hezbollah-this-year-despite-sanctions/>), Iran has funneled around \$1 billion to Hezbollah since the war ended. Although this is similar to the group's typical annual budget, its current expenses are much higher given the need to rebuild its arsenal, pay wartime compensation to fighters, families, and supporters, and recruit and train new fighters. Reconstruction of destroyed buildings and compensation costs to the Shia community alone **are estimated** (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/03/07/lebanon-s-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-estimated-at-us-11-billion>) to total more than \$11 billion.

**The political pillar.** Although Hezbollah lost its “blocking third” when Lebanon formed a new government earlier this year, it still managed to secure [appointments \(https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/levant-turkey/artc-new-government-formed-in-lebanon-with-hezbollah-despite-us-objections\)](https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/levant-turkey/artc-new-government-formed-in-lebanon-with-hezbollah-despite-us-objections) in key security and financial institutions with help from its top ally, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri. The group’s main priority now is to secure all twenty-seven Shia seats in May’s parliamentary election, thereby guaranteeing that it can name the next speaker and have a say in forming the next government.

**The Shia pillar.** Hezbollah does not need universal Shia support to meet its political goals—it only needs to ensure that the silent majority does not vote, and that any Shia political alternatives remain weak and under threat. Holding onto its weapons is essential to achieving these goals, since both rely on intimidation. Ultimately, the Shia community is [Hezbollah’s only means of surviving \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollahland-mapping-dahiya-and-lebanons-shia-community\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollahland-mapping-dahiya-and-lebanons-shia-community) in the long run, so it will not let go easily.

## Policy Recommendations

**T**argeting all of the above pillars is essential to preventing Hezbollah from rebuilding itself—a threat that Israel is no longer willing to tolerate. Washington should therefore work on two tracks to salvage the ceasefire agreement and prevent another war: the immediate track of disarmament, and a longer-term track to establish the conditions for peace between Israel and Lebanon. This approach should include the following measures:

- **Continued U.S. leadership, which includes maintaining the CENTCOM-led ceasefire implementation mechanism and placing more political pressure on the Lebanese government to fulfill its obligations.** Specifically, Beirut must clarify that private property can no longer be used to shield Hezbollah military activity; the LAF must be directed to search and demilitarize every part of Lebanon. Beirut should also provide a clear timeline for the entire disarmament process and execute accordingly.
- **Guaranteeing that the LAF will receive more U.S. assistance once disarmament moves forward,** in part to incentivize clarity on this process and motivate military units to take the requisite risks of confronting Hezbollah (in fact, this may be the only way to motivate them). For example, benchmarks could be established for sending specified U.S. assistance if certain sectors are cleared of Hezbollah weapons by certain dates. Conversely, if the LAF does not expand its efforts north of the Litani, Washington should be prepared to suspend its assistance entirely. There is no need to wait till year’s end to confirm the LAF’s seriousness on this front—using the existing ceasefire mechanism, Washington should ask Lebanese forces to take over at least one Hezbollah military facility north of the Litani now.
- **Preventing weapons smuggling into Lebanon by sea, air, or land, including cross-border transfers via Syria.** Demarcating the Lebanon-Syria border and promoting other cooperation between the two neighbors could help significantly in this regard, as would encouraging Damascus to declare the Shebaa Farms as Syrian territory, thereby depriving Hezbollah of a narrative founded on “resistance” to Israeli occupation of that supposed Lebanese territory.
- **Applying additional U.S. sanctions.** If targeted and timed appropriately, this measure could be especially useful given Hezbollah’s likely focus on addressing its postwar financial crunch in the coming months. In particular, Washington should consider sanctioning individuals for engaging in corruption and/or protecting Hezbollah, including high-ranking figures in the group’s allied Amal Party and even members of Berri’s family. The latter measure is amply justified under the Treasury Department’s Global Magnitsky authority, since Berri has made clear that he will side with the U.S.-designated terrorist group on every issue.
- **Targeting Hezbollah’s power in the next parliament.** This includes fostering and protecting Shia competitors to

Hezbollah and Amal, as well as helping the government establish [mega-voting centers](https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/articles/1314182/mega-voting-centers-a-comprehensive-guide) (<https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/articles/1314182/mega-voting-centers-a-comprehensive-guide>) to make it easier for displaced Shia to participate in the coming election without fear of Hezbollah intimidation.

- **Freezing implementation of Lebanon's laws against normalization** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/anti-normalization-laws-powerful-weapon-fight-against-peace>) **with Israel**, including sanctions on any officials who attempt to enforce this legislation.
- **Arranging U.S.-sponsored negotiations between Israel and Lebanon**, beginning with security arrangements.
- **Launching a Trump proposal for full peace between Israel and Lebanon**, including full disarmament of all nonstate actors. This could provide a strategic alternative to both war and Hezbollah's habit of posing as the country's protector.
- **Expressing U.S. support for an Israeli military option to destroy Hezbollah's remaining military capabilities** in the event that other channels fail, the current impasse proves insurmountable, and time runs out.

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## RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [Khomeini Promised Free Water. Iran Is Running Out of It.](#)

Nov 28, 2025

◆  
Holly Dagues

[\(/policy-analysis/khomeini-promised-free-water-iran-running-out-it\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [The New Syria, Year Two: Rebuilding Institutions and Governance](#)

December 4, 2025, starting at 12:00 noon EST (1700 GMT)

◆

Aaron Y. Zelin,  
James Jeffrey

(/policy-analysis/new-syria-year-two-rebuilding-institutions-and-governance)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

## A Year Later, Lebanon Still Won't Stand Up to Hezbollah

Nov 27, 2025



David Schenker

(/policy-analysis/year-later-lebanon-still-wont-stand-hezbollah)

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