

Another Lebanon Campaign: A Path Toward Peace?

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

The renewed conflict offers an opportunity to eradicate Hezbollah's capabilities, potentially clearing the way for breakthrough diplomacy with Israel.

Early on March 2, evidently heeding orders from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Hezbollah attacked Israel, igniting a new military conflict in Lebanon. In response, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stated that it would seek to destroy Hezbollah's remaining power and effectively remove the threat the group poses. But the current strategic context represents an even greater opportunity: to promote a tectonic change in Lebanon centered on a peace agreement—under the auspices of President Trump—and an agreed political path for the security of Israel and Lebanon.

New Hostilities

Shortly after midnight, Hezbollah fired rockets and drones at northern Israel, citing in its claim of responsibility (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/2/israel-bombs-beirut-after-hezbollah-launches-rocket-attack>) “revenge for the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and in defense of Lebanon and its people against Israel's aggression.” In the days since, Israel has struck hundreds of targets across Lebanon, including in Beirut, and called for residents of southern Lebanon to evacuate. Having already mobilized more than 100,000 reservists, Israel later bolstered its forces inside Lebanon in what it calls “forward defense” of Israel's border communities. Large-scale ground operations, at least in southern Lebanon, now appear imminent.

According to the head of IDF Northern Command, Hezbollah fell into a strategic ambush (<https://www.ynetnews.com/article/sytlehdhtzl>). Now, the Israeli military chief, Gen. Eyal Zamir, sees an opportunity to execute an existing plan aimed at devastating (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/defense-news/article-888554>) Hezbollah, thus eliminating the threat from Lebanon. With U.S. consent, Israel appears ready to take advantage of Hezbollah's attack to “finish the job” begun during the war that ended in November 2024.

The Lebanese government, for its part, responded to the attack by **banning** https://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/1489092/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9#google_vignette) all military and security activity from Hezbollah, although it allowed the group to continue as a political party. Specifically, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam condemned the rocket fire from Lebanon into Israel for violating the state’s authority to decide on war and peace. The government instructed the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to arrest the violators and implement the **working plan** <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/salvaging-lebanon-ceasefire-amid-looming-deadlines-and-threats-war>) to confiscate Hezbollah’s weapons, while expressing full readiness to resume negotiations with Israel, reinforced by civilian participation and international sponsorship.

The Hezbollah-affiliated newspaper *al-Akhbar* (<https://www.al-akhbar.com/NewsPaperArticles/lebanon/881396/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9---%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A3-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9>) reported that Prime Minister Salam and President Joseph Aoun demanded that the LAF commander, who advocates understandings and coordination with Hezbollah, quickly implement the disarmament plan “by all means available.” President Aoun even instructed the army to refrain from confronting Israel if it invaded Lebanon. On the ground, the Lebanese army evacuated positions near the Israeli border and established checkpoints further north to curb the flow of illicit arms and militants.

New Context, New Potential

“You cannot enter the same river twice,” according to the adage, and Israel’s new situation with Lebanon is thus more than a continuation of the 2024 war or an opening to complete Hezbollah’s disarmament. It occurs in a unique context with unique opportunities. Namely, the Iranian regime is fighting for its life, the United States and Israel are closely coordinated in their war effort, and Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa is hostile to Iran and Hezbollah—and simultaneously attentive to Washington’s requests. Moreover, the mandate for the UN Interim Force in Lebanon ends in 2026, and several Western countries are seeking to have their forces stay in Lebanon after UNIFIL dissolves.

During the current war, Iranian forces have launched missiles and drones at most of the Gulf states, Jordan, and even Turkey, with targets including energy infrastructure and civilian sites. Such aggression has tightened regional unity against Tehran. Hezbollah has even launched drones against Cyprus, stirring potential interest in European defensive action.

Domestically, Hezbollah sits at a historic nadir, facing a government that seeks its disarmament. Even the group’s longtime partner Amal was shocked by Hezbollah’s action, having been reassured that escalation was not its intention, and consequently supported the government’s move, leaving Hezbollah more isolated than ever. Its ability to threaten the Lebanese army and government with civil war and assassinations has dimmed, while resource flows to the group will undoubtedly suffer amid Iran’s weakening. Finally, the coming Lebanese election—initially scheduled for May but **postponed** (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-delay-may-elections->

[due-conflict-with-israel-officials-say-2026-03-03/](#) because of the renewed conflict—offers an opportunity to further weaken Hezbollah politically.

The current context therefore offers a strategic opportunity, beyond military achievements, to further undermine Hezbollah: by emboldening potential peace partners and rallying regional and global support, drawing on political activity to preserve, anchor, and expand these gains. Militarily, Israel apparently is looking to go beyond “finishing the job” of striking Hezbollah’s commanders, operatives, headquarters, production plants, weapons, and depots. Among the targets attacked in recent days are branches of the group’s al-Qard al-Hassan financial organization and its media outlets al-Manar television and al-Nour radio. This targeting reveals war goals aimed at systematically weakening Hezbollah, including its finances and propaganda.

Such direct damage to Hezbollah’s remaining forces paired with direct military pressure could improve the chances of implementing security and ceasefire agreements. In the shadow of the collapse of the Iranian axis, a wider opportunity has emerged in Lebanon.

Policy Recommendations

The renewed conflict in Lebanon offers an opportunity to promote systemic change in the country, encompassing the diplomatic, political, and security arenas. Success will depend on close coordination between the actors, and the synchronizing of military and diplomatic goals and efforts.

Diplomacy. Above all else, the war could facilitate a diplomatic process, brokered by President Trump, aimed at achieving a peace (through strength) deal between Israel and Lebanon. Such an agreement would guarantee security for both partners based on sovereignty and monopoly of arms.

Direct diplomacy could follow from Israel-Lebanon military talks that are focused on postwar security arrangements and IDF withdrawal. The U.S. role could be augmented by support from the Gulf states, relevant Western countries, and possibly the American-led Board of Peace. The Gulf states specifically could fill the vacuum in Lebanon left by Iran, and a peace deal within the Abraham Accords context could help all parties meet their goals in areas like energy, water, and advanced regional transportation, possibly working through the framework of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Any support or aid to Lebanon, however, should be conditioned on reforms and anti-militia efforts.

Hezbollah has long justified its “resistance” narrative based on disputed border issues such as Shebaa Farms. Washington can now potentially work with Damascus to resolve such disputes. Syria can also be a party to border security arrangements that help prevent future weapons smuggling to Lebanon, while addressing its own relations with Israel separately.

Politics. All these efforts require the defeat of Hezbollah in the coming election, whenever it occurs. The group’s decision to drag Lebanon into another war, this time in the service of Iran’s flailing regime, will probably harm its electoral prospects, but Israel and its allies and partners must increase financial, political, and legal pressure on the group, while supporting its rivals, to help bring about such an outcome.

Lebanon must remove legislation prohibiting contacts between Lebanese and Israelis, enact reforms to dry up Hezbollah’s sources of mostly illegal funding, and—fundamentally—offer the Shia population a social, economic, and political alternative to that long provided by the group. Further, the reconstruction of villages in the south, or their replacement by economic development zones, must be conditioned on their complete and permanent demilitarization, without any opportunity for Hezbollah to remilitarize them.

Military and security. Israel must conduct its military campaign with the postwar political horizon in mind: core elements include an improved security and political reality, efforts toward effective and stable security

arrangements, and a sustainable peace agreement. Military operations should strike at threatening elements (Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorist groups), while avoiding harm to the LAF, Hezbollah’s political rivals, and national and civilian infrastructure outside the military effort.

By the same token, Lebanese troops must refrain from the self-destructive act of fighting the IDF, a risk President Aoun appears to understand well. According to *al-Akhbar*, the U.S. Central Command army chief—who heads the International Monitoring and Implementation Mechanism developed at the close of the fighting in 2024—recently [stated \(https://www.al-](https://www.al-akhbar.com/NewspaperArticles/lebanon/881396/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9----%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A3-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9)

[akhbar.com/NewspaperArticles/lebanon/881396/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9----%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A3-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9](https://www.al-akhbar.com/NewspaperArticles/lebanon/881396/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9----%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A3-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9)) that the LAF must withdraw fifteen kilometers away from the border. His representatives in the IDF Northern Command could help implement quietly achieved understandings between the parties. In addition:

- The LAF must seize the opportunity provided by its government and Israel’s attacks to both prevent Hezbollah’s warfighting ability and expand its control on the border with Syria and other places where illicit armed elements operate, such as the refugee camps. After the war, the LAF and the Implementation Mechanism must be empowered to preserve and deepen the IDF’s achievements across Lebanon.
- The Lebanese army should clear all military sites attacked by the IDF, with verification by the U.S. military and possibly like-minded Western forces.
- The United States should press the Lebanese government to immediately enforce a state monopoly on arms and dismantle all militias and armed groups, including Hezbollah and the Palestinian organizations.
- Actors implementing a postwar disarmament plan must establish binding milestones and clear benchmarks, along with systematic documentation of weapons seized and destroyed—and prevent their return to unauthorized hands.
- Supporters of the Lebanese army should focus on capabilities relevant to disarmament, border security, and counterterrorism, and should condition assistance on its fulfillment of dismantling tasks and plan implementation.

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RECOMMENDED



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