

Let's Not Miss the Huge Opportunity for Peace Between Lebanon and Israel

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Articles & Testimony

If President Trump gave the Lebanon front just a fraction of the attention he has directed toward Iran and Gaza, he could wind up with the newest Arab member of the Abraham Accords—and a Nobel Peace Prize.

Defeating Iran is the main goal of the current Middle East war, but Lebanon may offer the best opportunity for a breakthrough toward peace—if only President Trump would pay attention. The opportunity for progress between Beirut and Jerusalem is real. Both countries—technically at war since 1949—have no territorial claims against each other. Both are led by governments firmly in the pro-U.S. camp, with militaries that are close partners with the U.S. armed forces. And both boast large, influential communities of supporters inside the United States that can play a helpful role in promoting peace.

The key obstacle to peace is Hezbollah, the terrorist group guided, funded and armed by Iran that took a drubbing in the 2024 war against Israel. For the first time, both Lebanon and Israel say they are committed to the principle of fully disarming this radical militia. Until the outbreak of the current war, the two governments may have disagreed on the pace of disarmament, but they were [working together \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/us-french-mechanism-20-preventing-escalation-between-lebanon-and-israel\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/us-french-mechanism-20-preventing-escalation-between-lebanon-and-israel) under U.S. auspices to share information on the location of Hezbollah weapons to be confiscated.

Progress on disarming Hezbollah was slow but even that was enough to give the Lebanese people the freedom to talk about the long-taboo topic of peace with Israel. Talk shows on Lebanon's freewheeling media [regularly discussed \(https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/articles/1327912/the-lebanese-demand-peace-with-israel\)](https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/articles/1327912/the-lebanese-demand-peace-with-israel) the costs and benefits of peace. Despite [strict laws \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/anti-normalization-laws-powerful-weapon-fight-against-peace\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/anti-normalization-laws-powerful-weapon-fight-against-peace) banning even innocent communication between Lebanese and Israelis, some candidates in upcoming parliamentary elections began running on brash "pro-peace" platforms (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdTaZmm5dFE>).

In the face of these hopeful signs, the Trump administration has been oddly aloof. Lebanon's president, Joseph Aoun, a former army commander who looks straight out of central casting, came to office a year ago promising to defang Hezbollah and [impose a monopoly \(https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanons-aoun-2025-will-be-year-state-monopoly-arms\)](https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanons-aoun-2025-will-be-year-state-monopoly-arms) on the use of force within the country. But so far, Trump's response has been to have absolutely no direct contact with Aoun—not a meeting, not a phone call, not a letter. Contrast this with the administration's wooing of Syria's president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, the former jihadi terrorist whom Trump met with twice, including last November in the Oval Office.

Trump's subordinates apparently got the message that Lebanon is not worth their time either. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has had just [one meeting \(https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/315500-aoun-meets-rubio-blair-and-us-congressmen-in-new-york#:~:text=President%20Joseph%20Aoun%20has%20met,Assembly%20meeting%20in%20New%20York.\)](https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/315500-aoun-meets-rubio-blair-and-us-congressmen-in-new-york#:~:text=President%20Joseph%20Aoun%20has%20met,Assembly%20meeting%20in%20New%20York.) with Aoun, in September on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. And there is no evidence that either special envoy Steve Witkoff or presidential problem solver Jared Kushner has met with Aoun since he became president.

Instead, the "Lebanon file," as it is called, has been shuffled from one lower-ranking official to another. Currently, it is in the hands of Michel Issa, the highly regarded U.S. ambassador in Beirut whose status as a ["friend of the president \(https://en.majalla.com/node/328394/profiles/michel-issa-trump%E2%80%99s-trusted-ambassador-takes-lebanon%E2%80%99s-hardest-file\)](https://en.majalla.com/node/328394/profiles/michel-issa-trump%E2%80%99s-trusted-ambassador-takes-lebanon%E2%80%99s-hardest-file)" can't overcome the geographic reality that he is almost 6,000 miles from Washington. The result of this apparent indifference has been not just a lost opportunity for U.S. interests but also a political bonanza for Hezbollah, sapping enthusiasm from the drive for disarmament and leaving pro-peace Lebanese out in the cold.

Now, Washington has a second chance to do the right thing. Out of allegiance to Iran's slain supreme leader, Hezbollah launched rockets against northern Israel, thereby dragging a war-weary Lebanon into the fight. This reckless act was [swiftly condemned \(https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-strikes-2026/card/lebanese-prime-minister-condemns-hezbollah-strikes-on-israel-46y7FPicjg90P1JzP2vd?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWEtsqdL7wnt4Rli3s8seZ2SW4BIYGE0HqK7UMzoJCFewZFYBywy7oYM7vVhHopYesw%3D&gaa_ts=69a9f1ad&gaa_sig=u0p1UTt0eEP-HB5BmM5eiKUL-iNFLHiGAlgeohtVmQ1Hat3xBVbJRNtQGZ1dan0fbj0UhgZLvBgM8HbF3LBeEg%3D%3D\)](https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-strikes-2026/card/lebanese-prime-minister-condemns-hezbollah-strikes-on-israel-46y7FPicjg90P1JzP2vd?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWEtsqdL7wnt4Rli3s8seZ2SW4BIYGE0HqK7UMzoJCFewZFYBywy7oYM7vVhHopYesw%3D&gaa_ts=69a9f1ad&gaa_sig=u0p1UTt0eEP-HB5BmM5eiKUL-iNFLHiGAlgeohtVmQ1Hat3xBVbJRNtQGZ1dan0fbj0UhgZLvBgM8HbF3LBeEg%3D%3D) by the Lebanese government, which ordered its army to take immediate action to prevent any further military activity by Hezbollah. At the same time, the rocket attacks triggered massive Israeli retaliation against Hezbollah strongholds in the Bekaa Valley, Beirut suburbs and southern Lebanon in advance of a ground operation to clear border areas of potential infiltrators

and weapons depots.

The political imagery is clear—the governments of Lebanon and Israel today view Hezbollah as their common adversary. Indeed, the Lebanese government declared its readiness, even during the current war, to [reengage in diplomatic talks \(https://x.com/LBpresidency/status/2028429652658700627?s=20\)](https://x.com/LBpresidency/status/2028429652658700627?s=20) with Israel on ways to cooperate on Hezbollah's full disarmament. Now is the time for America to take advantage of this confluence of views to achieve diplomatic breakthrough.

Operationally, the next step is Trump's. With one phone call to Aoun, the U.S. president could affirm high-level interest in Lebanon, promise additional aid to support the Lebanese army in disarming Hezbollah and threaten to withhold assistance if the process moves too slowly. At the same time, Trump should incentivize Aoun by promising an Oval Office meeting once U.S. generals certify that Lebanon has finally cleared weapons depots and arms factories from Hezbollah strongholds in the Bekaa Valley and Beirut's southern suburbs.

While disarmament proceeds, U.S. officials should take up Beirut's offer to organize direct talks with Israel. The agenda for negotiations should begin with security in southern Lebanon and border demarcation and extend to reciprocal steps that will feed a peacemaking dynamic. These could include plans to open each country's airspace to the other's civilian air traffic; to ship Israeli gas to Lebanon, thereby easing its energy crisis; and to allow third-country tourists to cross the border in both directions. Key to this process is eliciting from Lebanon a commitment to suspend enforcement of its odious anti-normalization laws, pending legislative action, so ordinary Lebanese do not fear imprisonment just for talking with an Israeli.

To manage this process, Trump should appoint someone in Washington as his personal envoy. In this administration, power is measured by closeness to Trump and foreign leaders will, rightly or wrongly, use that metric to determine how serious the president really is on their issues.

To be sure, Lebanon is a tiny country, and as dangerous as Hezbollah rockets may be, the threat that the once-mighty Iranian proxy poses to Israel has dramatically receded. But that's a reason to push for peace, not to lose focus. If Trump gave the Lebanon-Israel front just a fraction of the attention now directed toward Iran or a tiny percentage of the effort devoted to Gaza, he may have the newest Arab member of the Abraham Accords—and a Nobel Peace Prize to show for it.

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