# Europe's Offer to Help Strengthen Lebanon's Sovereignty: Ensuring U.S. Coordination

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Brief Analysis

## As UN peacekeepers prepare to depart, an EU mission could help boost Washington's efforts in Lebanon—provided Europeans can closely coordinate their proposals with the future UN presence and the U.S. focus on sovereignty and disarmament.

The newly signed framework agreement **(https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/06/trilateral-framework-between-the-united-states-of-america-the-state-of-israel-and-the-republic-of-lebanon)** between Israel and Lebanon lays down ambitious milestones on the road toward an eventual peace treaty. With the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) preparing to withdraw and the United States unlikely to send its own troops there, defining the mechanisms to implement the framework's intermediate steps will be a challenge. In particular, officials need to iron out the details regarding the "performance-based program to enable the capacity of the LAF to assert full military and security control within Lebanon," including agreed steps toward "verified disarmament of all non-state armed groups."

The question of European involvement in these processes is not currently central to U.S. strategy. Yet the framework agreement acknowledges that Lebanon will need the support of "international partners" to establish full sovereignty, while a recent G7 statement **(https://www.elysee.fr/en/G7evian/2026/06/17/g7-leaders-statement-on-geopolitical-issues)** called for the protection of "Lebanon's territorial integrity and sovereignty with the appropriate international security guarantees," indicating a potential multinational effort. Indeed, discussions over a new EU mission in Lebanon are under way, and various European governments are poised to help share the burden and synergize with Washington's efforts. Yet close and candid transatlantic coordination will be necessary to reinforce the shared U.S. and European goals of strengthening Beirut's sovereignty and its ability to disarm

Hezbollah.

## A Realistic UN Presence Post-UNIFIL?

In a recent letter **(https://unifil.unmissions.org/en/document-library/letter-from-the-secretary-general-addressed-to-the-president-of-the)** to the UN Security Council, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres defined five "core functions" for the UN presence in Lebanon after the five-decade UNIFIL mission was formally shuttered last year. In August, Security Council Resolution 2790 **(https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2790(2025))** tasked him to come up with options to implement Resolution 1701 after UNIFIL's withdrawal. Adopted in 2006, Resolution 1701 ended the previous Israel-Hezbollah war and mandated international monitoring of the ceasefire around the UN-demarcated Blue Line, along with the disarmament of all militias, the withdrawal of Israeli forces, and redeployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) south of the Litani River.

The secretary-general's letter specifically outlined three mission options that vary in scope and personnel. The most ambitious would include 350 unarmed observers along with four armed infantry battalions (roughly 750 troops each) for force protection and a 700-person reserve, for a total of around 4,050 personnel. The most modest option would include 215 unarmed observers, two light infantry battalions (roughly 450 troops each), and a quick reaction force of 350 troops, for a total of 1,465. By comparison, 7,478 UN peacekeepers **(https://unifil.unmissions.org/en/unifil-troop-contributing-countries)** are currently stationed in Lebanon as of May 1.

According to discussions with UN officials, Lebanese authorities urged Guterres to maintain UN functions related to Israeli-Lebanese military liaison and support to the LAF. Likewise, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam has publicly called for maintaining **(https://dailybeirut.com/en/lebanon-news/prime-minister-nawaf-salam-emphasizes-need-for-un-force-in-southern-lebanon/)** as broad a UN presence as possible. To explain the disparity between the small observer contingents and large armed contingents in the secretary-general's proposals, UN officials point to the volatile security situation on the ground, which has resulted in the deaths of seven peacekeepers **(https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/06/1167645)** since March. Moreover, every Security Council resolution adopted for the purpose of renewing Resolution 1701 has tasked the UN with monitoring the Blue Line, which entails UN observation posts on the ground.

Yet these justifications may not be sufficient for Washington, which expects any UN successor mission to be much more limited in scope and size. Last year, the U.S. representative to the UN stated that Washington wants Lebanon to "assume greater responsibility **(https://usun.usmission.gov/explanation-of-vote-on-the-un-security-council-mandate-renewal-of-the-un-interim-force-in-lebanon-unifil/)** ," implying that it views any large UNIFIL presence as disempowering the LAF. This stance reflects longstanding U.S. criticisms of UNIFIL and suggests that any future UN contingent focused on supporting the LAF will face skepticism or outright opposition from Washington. The Trump administration aims to help the LAF build its capacity as the sole legitimate defender of Lebanon's sovereignty, but U.S. officials do not trust the UN to help in that mission. This is where a European mission could play a useful role.

## An EU Mission to Complement, Not Replace, Existing Efforts

On June 15, EU High Representative Kaja Kallas confirmed **(https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-press-remarks-high-representative-kaja-kallas-press-conference-0_en?s=203)** that officials are "advancing work on a new EU mission in Lebanon." A few days later, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni announced that Rome and Paris had agreed to launch a multinational "coalition **(https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1539408/italy-france-seek-to-launch-coalition-to-support-lebanon-**

**after-unifil.html)** ” to support Lebanon post-UNIFIL. It remains unclear whether the two initiatives are the same or distinct.

Whatever the case, any European mission will aim to complement U.S. efforts, not compete with them. The EU has long been clear about Hezbollah’s primary responsibility for the war in Lebanon and the necessity of disarmament; it has also listed the group’s military wing as a terrorist entity. Furthermore, Europeans support the direct U.S.-led negotiations between Israel and Lebanon and their potential to deliver lasting security for both countries. They also share President Trump’s **expressed skepticism (https://www.newarab.com/news/trump-delivers-rare-public-rebuke-israel-over-lebanon-strikes)** regarding Israel’s military tactics in Lebanon, though they express it differently and with reference to **international humanitarian law (https://www.government.is/publications/statements/statement/2026-04-14-Joint-Statement-on-Lebanon)** .

Against this backdrop, a European mission—distinct from but complementary to the UN presence—could take the shape of a “Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)” mission. Such missions can be civilian and/or military. For instance, the EU Advisory Mission in Iraq advises authorities in Baghdad on security sector reform, while the EU Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) launched Operation IRINI in Libya to help implement the UN arms embargo via satellite, aerial, and maritime assets.

To be clear, no European presence will have a mandate to engage Hezbollah militarily. Rather, its objective would be to help build the LAF’s capabilities and enable a strengthened Lebanese state to regain control of its territory down the road.

# Recommendations

Because a meaningful European contribution will require buy-in from all stakeholders, they should clarify and align their efforts as follows:

**Europe**. In early June, the EU approved an LAF assistance package of 100 million euros to strengthen state authority and support the disarmament of Hezbollah. This positive step reinforces the unilateral support that several European countries already provide to the LAF, including France **(https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-send-armored-vehicles-lebanon-macron-says-2026-03-05/)** , the Netherlands **(https://www.jns.org/news/world/netherlands-to-step-up-support-for-laf-in-bid-to-counter-hezbollah)** , and others.

To continue playing a useful role, Europeans must articulate a clear and coherent strategy behind their proposed mission long before UNIFIL’s withdrawal formally begins next January. Will it be a purely European mission, an international coalition, or both? And what exactly will its added value be? In answering these questions, officials must avoid undermining the EU’s credibility by making grand announcements while allocating insufficient resources. Their proposals should instead align mission capabilities with the targeted objectives **(https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-council-press-remarks-high-representative-kaja-kallas-upon-arrival-3_en)** described above: supporting the LAF and boosting its ability to disarm Hezbollah.

For example, the EU could focus on training Lebanese troops involved in border control, particularly with regard to cutting off Hezbollah’s supply line from Syria. Smuggling **remains widespread (https://opensyr.com/en/pages/p-39)** along that frontier despite improved cooperation between Beirut and Damascus. In parallel, the EU could invest in helping the LAF upgrade its navy in order to better monitor Lebanon’s territorial waters and curb weapons trafficking. Beirut currently relies on the UNIFIL’s Maritime Task Force for such missions, but this force may be phased out progressively.

**United States**. To facilitate coordination of international efforts, Washington would need to establish greater coherence between the various Lebanon-related initiatives it has launched of late. For instance, as part of the Iran

negotiations, it proposed a "joint U.S.-Lebanese-Iranian cell (https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/320891-vance-rubio-discuss-with-aoun-formation-of-joint-us-lebanese-iranian-cell) to solidify Lebanon's ceasefire," yet this idea seems entirely at odds with the proposals in the trilateral U.S.-Lebanon-Israel framework. Clarifying this discrepancy will be essential.

Similarly, the best U.S. approach would be to coordinate with existing European initiatives rather than simply duplicating them. For instance, the newly announced trilateral Military Coordination Group for Lebanon (MCG4L (https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/06/the-united-states-israel-and-lebanon-sign-the-trilateral-framework/)) will need to work closely with the Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTC4L (https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/meetings-military-technical-committee-lebanon-mtc4l-discuss-support-measures-army)), an Italian-led multinational structure that the United States and other countries joined in March 2024 with the goal of reinforcing Lebanon's security institutions.

Moreover, the repeated failure to identify a third party (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/us-french-mechanism-20-preventing-escalation-between-lebanon-and-israel) capable of assessing implementation of the Hezbollah disarmament plan contributed to the stalemate that impeded progress last year. This could happen again if authorities do not clarify the verification process to be used for the nascent "pilot zones (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/14-points-14-points-assessing-israel-lebanon-framework-agreement)" in southern Lebanon. Some European countries are willing to deploy troops to participate in this process, so Washington could consider them as part of the "mutually agreed-upon third-party entity" referred to in publicly reported versions of the Trilateral Framework's security annex (https://x.com/HibaNasr/status/2071617895331746115?s=20).

**Lebanon.** Following months of debates over whether the LAF's dearth of progress against Hezbollah stems from lack of ability or lack of will, Beirut has convinced Washington and Europe that at least part of the answer lies in capacity shortfalls. Given the proliferation of initiatives to support the LAF, Beirut must now take the lead in three ways. First, it must specify the military's needs in concrete terms (though this may need to be done privately given the sensitivity of such security matters). Second, it must demonstrate that it welcomes international support in order to strengthen its own capabilities, not to outsource its security needs. As mentioned above, this includes taking action on the necessary expansion (https://unifil.unmissions.org/en/news/unifil-naval-peacekeepers-help-lebanese-navy-take-on-maritime-security-duties) of its navy. Third, it must extend its protection as a host country by holding those who attack foreign partners accountable and bringing them to prompt justice.

**Israel**. European relations with Israel are in very bad shape. Most recently, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar severed (https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-foreign-minister-severs-contact-with-eu-foreign-policy-chief-2026-06-18/) contact with EU High Representative Kallas after accusing her of comparing his country to apartheid-era South Africa in private meetings—a significant rupture given that she heads the European External Action Service, the institution that would implement any potential EU mission in Lebanon.

Going forward, European officials should keep in mind the trilateral agreement's declaration that Israel has "no territorial ambitions in Lebanon," which provides welcome contradiction to remarks by some Israeli ministers (https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-minister-calls-annexation-southern-lebanon-2026-03-23/). In the meantime, they must find ways to deconflict any EU mission in Lebanon with the Israeli government—especially if Israeli forces are still conducting ground operations there.

For their part, Israeli leaders would be wise to accept a European presence aimed at empowering the LAF. They should also heed the lesson Israel first learned decades ago—that occupying Lebanese territory to protect itself ultimately reinforces the narrative of malign actors who insist on keeping large military arsenals of their own in order to "resist" the occupation. If anything, the best answer to Israel's security dilemma lies in strengthening those

elements of the Lebanese government who have expressed political determination to consolidate sovereignty.

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