Lebanon's Explosives Case Highlights the Judicial Obstacles to Disarming Hezbollah

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Brief Analysis

Unless Washington makes judicial reform and credible enforcement part of its engagement with Beirut, government decisions to disarm and dismantle Hezbollah will remain vulnerable to obstruction and coercion.

The seizure **(https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/features/reports/will-lebanon-deliver-justice-in-the-explosives-case-or-is-it-political-theater)** of around 500 kilograms of explosives from a vehicle in Dahr al-Baidar last month has rekindled the perennial question of who controls weapons in Lebanon: Hezbollah or the state. The Internal Security Forces (ISF) intercepted the cargo, but the challenge became apparent when the case reached the Permanent Military Court, a body with a long track record of shielding Hezbollah from accountability (see below). Justice Minister Adel Nassar called **(https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/323236-cabinet-to-discuss-referring-hezbollah-explosives-case-to-judicial-council?utm_source=chatgpt.com)** for referring the case to the Judicial Council—the country's highest court for national security crimes—but the cabinet postponed the decision amid political pressure and threats **(https://waradana.com/english/article/276041-hezbollah-threatens-internal-escalation-over-explosives-shipment-investigation)** from Hezbollah.

At stake are several of Lebanon's most serious legal and security issues. Hezbollah is looking to protect the institutional influence **(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/countering-hezbollahs-reconstruction-politics-and-council-south-lebanon)** and freedom of movement it needs to continue rebuilding its depleted military arsenal and domestic legitimacy. For the government, the case is testing its willingness to assert sovereignty, enforce its decisions, fulfill its commitments under the U.S.-brokered trilateral framework agreement **(https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesman/2026/06/trilateral-framework-between-the-united-states-of-america-the-state-of-israel-and-the-republic-of-lebanon)** with Israel, and, not least, protect the populace—a concern that should not be overlooked given that Hezbollah has used similar C-4 explosives in the past

to assassinate **(https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2026/10/12/lebanon-vows-firm-action-after-seizing-explosives-including-those-linked-to-assassinations)** Lebanese politicians and journalists.

Hezbollah Doubles Down

So far, the group's direct challenge to state authority seems to be working. On November 5, a senior Hezbollah delegation visited **(https://www.mtv.com.lb/en/news/1755526)** Beirut's Palace of Justice to convey a pointed message to Judge Ahmad Rami al-Hajj, the prosecutor-general of the Court of Cassation. Declaring that the seized explosives belonged to their group and were intended for operations against Israel, they argued that any conviction in the case would amount to "cutting off the hand of the resistance," echoing previous statements **(https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hezbollah-says-it-owned-confiscated-explosives-meant-attack-israel-2026-10-15/)** by one of Hezbollah's members of parliament. It was bad enough that the country's highest-ranking prosecutor even received a delegation linked to a crime, but Judge Hajj compounded the transgression by telling a reporter **(https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/news/politics/lebanons-prosecutor-general-explains-absence-of-terrorism-charges-in-hezbollah-explosives-case)** on November 9 that lack of evidence was the reason why terrorism charges had not been filed against the suspects—despite receiving clear evidence straight from the terrorist's mouth, so to speak.

The same day that Hajj was hosting Hezbollah members in his chambers, the United States released a joint statement **(https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1553444/arrest-warrants-issued-for-2-hezbollah-members-11-others-to-be-summoned-dahr-al-baidar-explosives-case.html)** with Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom calling for an independent investigation into the explosives seizure. (France was reportedly **(https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1553649/dahr-al-baidar-case-why-france-stayed-off-the-5-embassies-statement.html)** invited to join but declined.) This followed the Military Court's October 30 decision to charge thirteen individuals with offenses related to state security and unauthorized weapons transportation. Yet only two of the suspects—Haitham Amhaz and Ali al-Kurdi—were detained, even though all thirteen were involved in transporting a massive cargo of deadly materials from the Beqa Valley to the southern suburbs of the capital. Two weeks later, Military Court investigators have yet to publicly announce who authorized the delivery or controlled the network that supplied it, despite Hezbollah's very public claims of ownership

Indeed, the group's statements alone give investigators plausible reason not only to move the case forward and detain the suspects who remain free, but also to hold Hezbollah's leadership responsible. This will only be possible if the case is referred to the Judicial Council, as the joint statement implied in calling for a clear path toward accountability. Such a referral requires a cabinet decree placing the alleged offenses within the jurisdiction of this special national security court. On October 22, however, the cabinet postponed **(https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/features/reports/will-lebanon-deliver-justice-in-the-explosives-case-or-is-it-political-theater)** the referral decision, prompting ministers from the Lebanese Forces party to walk out of the meeting. And because cabinet officials have not announced a date for their next meeting on the case, it could remain under the biased Military Court indefinitely.

Charging thirteen Hezbollah members with serious crimes was a welcome step, but filing charges is not enough—true accountability requires establishing who organized the explosives delivery and enforcing legal consequences. The need for urgent action intensified when the ISF arrested **(https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/news/politics/5-hezbollah-members-arrested-between-batroun-and-bcharre-districts-in-lebanon)** five more Hezbollah members on November 10. According to the ISF's Information Branch, these suspects were found with documents that mentioned sniper weapons and listed locations across the country's Christian-populated northern districts, pointing to further internal security threats.

Why the Judicial Council Is a Better Option

The Military Court's inability to properly handle these types of cases can be traced back to the post-civil war period, when the subordination of Lebanese institutions to Syria's Assad regime greatly weakened judicial credibility and independence. The Military Court in particular became an **instrument (https://umam-dr.org/EN/publication_detail/30/)** for repressing journalists, political **activists (https://israel-alma.org/lebanons-military-court-and-its-president-tipping-the-scales-in-hezbollahs-favor/)** , and other civilians while shielding Assad's local allies from accountability.

Hezbollah inherited this instrument when Syria withdrew from Lebanon in 2005. Since then, not a single member of the group has been held accountable for acts of terrorism, assassinations, street violence, bombings, or other threats against national security, including the devastating Beirut port explosion in 2020.

This judicial malpractice has been no less evident in 2026. On March 9, one week after the government declared Hezbollah's military and security activities illegal, the Military Court **released (https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1498250/hezbollah-supporters-arrested-last-week-were-released-on-21-bail.html)** three of the group's members. All three had been convicted of illegally possessing and transporting weapons, and all three cited their Hezbollah membership when asked to explain why they were transporting the weapons. Yet each received a paltry fine of 900,000 Lebanese pounds—approximately $10.

On March 16, four **additional (https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1499478/4-armed-hezbollah-supporters-referred-to-military-investigating-judge.html)** Hezbollah members faced charges after being arrested at army checkpoints. Two were transporting 122-millimeter rockets, while the others possessed rifles and pistols. All four were released in April.

The thirteen suspects in the Dahr al-Baidar investigation face even more serious allegations, and Hezbollah has openly acknowledged ownership of the seized explosives. Yet the case will go nowhere if it remains within the same military judicial system that has repeatedly imposed laughable penalties—or no penalties at all—on the group's members.

Unlike the Military Court, the Judicial Council consists of senior civilian judges and was specifically created to prosecute serious national security cases. Although a cabinet referral to the council would not guarantee independence or accountability, it would at least place the case outside the deeply compromised military tribunal system.

Policy Recommendations

The Dahr al-Baidar case demonstrates that Lebanese authorities have the capacity and authority to intercept weapons linked to Hezbollah and initiate criminal proceedings. The state must now prove that it can bring those responsible before a competent court, convict them of serious crimes, and enforce these judgements. Disarmament must be measured not just by weapons seizures, but by what happens to those who deliver, receive, and claim ownership of those weapons. Even if the government and armed forces start dismantling Hezbollah's infrastructure and arsenal **in earnest (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/lebanons-framework-stuck-neutral-political-will-not-capability-or-verification-key)** , such gains will not mean much in the long term if the group can keep evading meaningful legal consequences by influencing or coercing judges and prosecutors. More immediately, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam and the cabinet risk reinforcing Hezbollah's pattern of political pressure and eroding the government's credibility at home and abroad if they keep delaying referral of the explosives case to the Judicial Council. Judicial reform must therefore be regarded as a vital part of the disarmament effort.

Toward that end, Washington should pair its support for Lebanon's government, military, and security institutions

with greater attention to the judiciary, particularly the Military Court. This includes the following steps:

- **Press Beirut to refer the Dahr al-Baidar case to the Judicial Council.** The November 5 joint statement was a good start, but it needs to be followed up with clear communications from Washington and its partners about the consequences of imposing minimal or no penalties on those involved in the explosives delivery. Toward that end, they should push for an independent process before civilian judges, with accountability based on evidence.
- **Use U.S. government assistance as leverage to push for judicial reform and end military trials of civilians.** Washington should incorporate measurable judicial reform benchmarks (https://www.skeyesmedia.org/documents/bo_filemanager/International-Aid-to-Security--Judiciary-EN.pdf) into its assistance framework for Lebanon, including restrictions on the Military Court's jurisdiction over civilians, stronger safeguards against political interference, and greater transparency in judicial appointments and sentencing. The military court is a beneficiary of U.S. assistance (https://www.cfr.org/articles/should-united-states-be-supporting-lebanese-army) to the Lebanese Armed Forces, so officials can leverage that funding to advance accountability.
- **Use targeted sanctions against Lebanese officials who obstruct justice.** The U.S. Treasury and State Departments should review any judges or other individuals suspected of serious corruption or interference in criminal proceedings, especially in cases involving the seizure of illegal weapons.
- **Coordinate diplomatic and financial support to promote judicial independence.** Washington should work with European partners and international judicial reform organizations to support transparent appointments, independent procedures, and stronger civilian criminal courts in Lebanon. Relatedly, by establishing a public framework for weapons-related cases, Beirut could make the data on such prosecutions more transparent and help authorities in Lebanon and abroad assess whether the law is being applied consistently across all cases.
- **Increase assistance to the ISF, mainly its Information Branch.** So far, most of the arrests of Hezbollah members and illegal weapons seizures have been conducted by the ISF, which is showing more commitment to disarmament than any other security institution in Lebanon. Additional assistance and vocal support to ISF officers could further their mission and help protect them against intimidation by Hezbollah.

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