

Lebanon and Israel

Today and the Day After

The Eastern Mediterranean Initiative



GCSP
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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Between October 8, 2023 and November 27, 2024, Israel and Hezbollah engaged in a devastating war that displaced tens of thousands of civilians along both sides of the Israel–Lebanon border and effectively destroyed numerous Lebanese and Israeli communities. Heightened rhetoric eventually escalated into full-scale military confrontation. In mid-September 2024, Israel launched a series of aerial and clandestine operations targeting Hezbollah’s command structure and senior leadership, and laying the groundwork for a ground incursion by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) starting on October 1, 2024.

Under mounting military pressure, Hezbollah sought an end to the conflict. On November 27, 2024, Israel and Lebanon reached a temporary ceasefire agreement.¹ The deal established a 60-day window for the IDF to withdraw from Lebanese territory and for Hezbollah to reposition its forces north of the Litani River. Facilitated by the United States and France, this “arrangement” outlined steps toward resuming the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701, which concluded the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah.²

¹ Times of Israel. 2024. “Full text: The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire deal.” November 27. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-the-israel-hezbollah-ceasefire-deal/>.

² Bahout, J. and Y. Tashjian. 2025. “Beyond a ceasefire: A comparative analysis of UNSCR 1701 and the 2024 Ceasefire Agreement.” Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut. <https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/Comparative-Analysis-of-UNSCR-1701-and-the-2024-Ceasefire-Agreement.pdf>.

The implementation of the ceasefire agreement has faced serious challenges. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have been slow to deploy across southern Lebanon, seize Hezbollah's weaponry, and dismantle its positions. In turn, Israel has maintained its presence in several strategic locations beyond the February deadline for the IDF's withdrawal and continues to carry out airstrikes against Hezbollah that have thus far gone unanswered.³

"[...] the war has fundamentally altered political discourse in Lebanon and Israel."

Nonetheless, the war has fundamentally altered political discourse in Lebanon and Israel. Hezbollah's claim to be a defensive force safeguarding Lebanon has come under intense scrutiny. This shift has created space for Lebanese political figures and activists to reconsider Lebanon's national security strategy and its broader relationship with Israel. Some are advocating for the negotiation of a peace agreement or the normalization of ties between the two countries,⁴ while others favor strengthening the terms of the 1949 Armistice Agreement to cover the current situation.⁵ On the Israeli side, officials have also begun cautiously discussing prospects for the normalization of Israel-Lebanon relations.⁶

This Policy Brief draws on the views shared by experts from Israel and Lebanon in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean Initiative (EMI), a platform dedicated to addressing regional tensions and advancing cooperative solutions. It recommends that the governments of Israel and Lebanon seize this historic opportunity and pursue a durable resolution to the political and territorial disputes between the two nations. Lasting peace, however, depends on the putting in place of critical short- and medium-term steps that can move both societies away from the trauma of war toward a more secure and prosperous future. The Policy Brief outlines the central issues of the conflict and the policy priorities of each side, with the aim of guiding Israeli, Lebanese, and international actors toward the negotiation and implementation of a permanent and sustainable peace.

"Some are advocating for the negotiation of a peace agreement or the normalization of ties between the two countries, while others favor strengthening the terms of the 1949 Armistice Agreement to cover the current situation."

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- 3 Wood, D. and H. Wimmen. 2025. "Reinforcing the shaky Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire." International Crisis Group. July 14. https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/east-mediterranean-mena/lebanon-israelpalestine-united-states/reinforcing-shaky-israel-lebanon-cease-fire?utm_source=mailchimp&utm_medium=email.
- 4 Nova.News. 2025. "Lebanon, Sunni MP Baarini: 'Yes to normalization with Israel if it leads to peace!'" April 2. <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/libano-il-deputato-sunnita-baarini-si-alla-normalizzazione-con-israele-se-porta-alla-pace/?utm>.
- 5 L'Orient Today. 2025. "'The decision to limit weapons to the state has been taken,' says Aoun, advocates dialogue over force." April 14. <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1456027/the-decision-to-limit-weapons-to-the-state-has-been-taken-says-aoun-advocates-dialogue-over-force.html>.
- 6 Cornwell, A. 2025. "Israel eyes ties with Syria and Lebanon after Iran war." June 30. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-interest-ed-establishing-diplomatic-ties-with-syria-lebanon-foreign-2025-06-30/?utm>.

IMPLEMENTING THE CEASEFIRE

The immediate priority in the short term is the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the transfer of responsibility for implementing UNSCR 1701 to the LAF.

Israeli Considerations

Israel's post-October 7 security doctrine has shifted from containment to a more assertive posture that prioritizes decisive military responses to any breach of national security. Along the country's northern border, the Israeli government must ensure the safe return of residents, contingent on Lebanese compliance with the ceasefire and the credible threat of Israeli retaliation in case of violations. **Therefore, it is in Israel's national security interest to pursue the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement through the following steps:**

- **Accountability and restraint.** Israel should hold the Lebanese government accountable for ceasefire violations while empowering it to enforce compliance. Non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas will likely test the agreement. Israel must balance restraint with security.
- **Monitoring Hezbollah.** Although weakened, Hezbollah remains a potent force. Israel must monitor developments on the ground and allow space for the Lebanese government to assert sovereignty.
- **Minimizing interference in Lebanon.** Israeli intervention in Lebanon's domestic affairs risks delegitimizing Lebanese state institutions and strengthening Hezbollah's narrative.
- **Israeli domestic expectations.** Israeli leaders must manage domestic expectations by encouraging the country's people to recognize that the implementation of the agreement will be gradual and imperfect.

Lebanese Considerations

The ceasefire was signed before the election of Lebanese president Joseph Aoun and the formation of a new cabinet led by Judge Nawaf Salam. Progress has been made in dismantling Hezbollah's infrastructure along the border, but the current Lebanese leadership consider disarmament beyond these areas to be politically sensitive. In May 2025, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas visited Lebanon, and a plan was agreed on to begin disarming Palestinian factions in Beirut-area camps, starting with Fatah.⁷ What matters at this stage for the success of the implementation of the ceasefire is the following:

- **Political commitment.** The commitment of both Lebanese leaders, Aoun and Salam, to honoring the ceasefire and implementing UNSCR 1701, including the disarmament of Hezbollah and Palestinian factions in refugee camps, is central.⁸ President Aoun has mentioned that the decision had been made regarding this disarmament process.

7 Tapper, M.K. 2025. "Lebanon begins drive to defang militant groups." Financial Times. May 23. <https://www.ft.com/content/891cb96f-0ea9-49a8-9b8d-ce11c4782ebe?utm>.

8 Ghaddar, H. and E. Yaari. 2025. "Disarming Palestinian Factions in Lebanon means disarming Hezbollah." Washington Institute for Near East Policy. May 21. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/disarming-palestinian-factions-lebanon-means-disarming-hezbollah>.

- **International backing.** Continued international support for President Aoun and Prime Minister Salam is essential, even though the president's approach is frustrating many in the country and is being considered slow in terms of action. Lebanese authorities – mainly the president – argue that engagement with Hezbollah's leadership on disarmament is essential to avoid internal conflict.
- **Empowering the LAF.** Supporting the work of the ceasefire monitoring committee is essential. Allowing the LAF to take action in areas considered as threats to Israel is much more preferable than Israel striking them directly, which has already happened more than once in Beirut.
- **Disarming all Palestinian factions.** A failure to disarm Hamas in Lebanon could result in Lebanon's refugee camps falling under Hamas control, which is an alarming prospect. Regional Arab support is needed to expedite this process and back Lebanese efforts to prevent resistance from Hamas. Additionally, Lebanon should pursue the deportation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders from its territory.

The Role of International Mediators

The United States, France, and the UN should remain actively engaged in monitoring compliance with the ceasefire agreement and facilitating communication between the parties. Both the Israeli and Lebanese governments expect these actors, along with players like Saudi Arabia and the European Union, to play a role in Lebanon's rehabilitation and reconstruction. The Israeli government will rely on these actors to exert pressure on Beirut as necessary.

BORDERS, RECONSTRUCTION, AND POLITICAL STABILITY

Border Demarcation and Hezbollah's Relocation

A central medium-term priority for both Israel and Lebanon is the demarcation of their shared land border and the relocation of Hezbollah forces north of the Litani River. Successfully moving Hezbollah's military infrastructure out of southern Lebanon would significantly reduce the threat to Israeli communities near the border. Simultaneously, progress must be made on resolving the 13 disputed land boundary points between the two countries.⁹ A phased negotiation strategy – beginning with

less contentious issues – offers the best chance of building trust and maintaining momentum. The most difficult disputes include Point B1, near Naqoura and Rosh Hanikra, which is particularly sensitive due to its implications for maritime

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boundaries, and the contested areas of Shebaa Farms, Mount Dov, and the divided village of Ghajar, which lie at the Lebanon–Israel–Syria triborder and will likely require the involvement of Syria's new government.¹⁰ To ensure transparency and public support, these negotiations should be led by diplomats and elected officials.

⁹ El Jammal, R. 2025. "Lebanon-Israel border disputes: Can talks lead to a lasting truce?" The New Arab. March 12. <https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanon-israel-border-disputes-can-talks-lead-lasting-truce?utm>.

¹⁰ Kaufman, A. 2009. "'Let sleeping dogs lie:' On Ghajar and other anomalies in the Syria-Lebanon-Israel tri-border region." Middle East Journal, 63(4), 539–560. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20622953>.

Preventing the resurgence of Hezbollah is another vital goal. Israel expects the Lebanese government to fulfill its obligations under UNSCR 1701, which include preventing Hezbollah from rearming or rebuilding its military infrastructure. Achieving this will require strict control over the Syria–Lebanon border, which has historically been a conduit for weapons smuggling. The LAF must be strengthened and supported by international partners to effectively monitor and secure this frontier. Additional assistance from the United States, United Kingdom, and France may be necessary to bolster the LAF’s capacity and reassure Israel of Lebanon’s ability to enforce demilitarization measures. Successfully resolving border disputes would also undermine Hezbollah’s primary justification for its continued armed resistance and could pave the way toward de facto peace.

In parallel, the evolving political landscape in Syria presents a unique opportunity for trilateral dialogue among Israel, Lebanon, and Syria. Quiet, informal discussions could address lingering issues in disputed areas such as Shebaa Farms and Ghajar and help stabilize broader regional dynamics. While such dialogue will require discretion and careful diplomacy, it holds the potential to contribute meaningfully to long-term conflict resolution and regional normalization.

Reconstruction

To date, the Lebanese government has not presented a comprehensive plan for post-conflict reconstruction in the south. While Hezbollah has proposed a compensation mechanism for affected communities, implementation has been inconsistent and has yielded limited tangible results. Internal disputes in the previous Lebanese cabinet – particularly over contentious issues such as debris disposal – have further delayed progress. The current minister of public works, who was appointed by Druze political leader Walid Jumblatt, has yet to launch any significant initiatives, leaving reconstruction at a virtual standstill.

From Lebanon’s perspective, the most immediate and pressing obstacle remains funding. The recent appointment of Mohamad Kabani – widely believed to be a preferred candidate of Saudi Arabia – as the head of the Council for Development and Reconstruction¹¹ may indicate a shift in direction or a renewed intent to attract aid from Gulf states. However, to date, no substantial international financial support has been secured, and donor confidence remains low, given Lebanon’s political instability and history of corruption.

From Israel’s perspective, reconstruction is not just a humanitarian or developmental concern, but a matter of national security. There is significant apprehension that, without proper oversight, Hezbollah could use reconstruction to rebuild military infrastructure, including tunnels or dual-use facilities. Consequently, any reconstruction effort must be accompanied by a credible international monitoring mechanism to ensure transparency and prevent militarization.

Moreover, rebuilding should not merely aim to restore what was lost, but to improve it. Emphasis must be placed on sustainable development – incorporating energy-efficient green buildings; decentralized renewable energy systems; and modern, smart infrastructure – to create long-term resilience and reduce dependency on vulnerable systems.¹²

11 L’Orient Today. 2025. “Cabinet reassigns North Lebanon governor and appoints CDR president.” May 14. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1460234/cabinet-reassigns-north-lebanon-governor-and-appoints-cdr-president.html>.

12 Arab Reform Initiative. 2025. “Rebuilding Lebanon: Clean energy access and challenges.” February 19. <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/rebuilding-lebanon-clean-energy-access-and-challenges/?tztc=1>.

Political Stability

Lebanon's political scene remains highly fragmented in the aftermath of the recent conflict. The ceasefire was negotiated not by the official executive branch, but by the speaker of Parliament acting on behalf of Hezbollah, and was signed by a caretaker government during a presidential vacuum. This irregular process has exposed deep internal divisions, particularly over Hezbollah's unilateral decision to enter the war and conflicting interpretations of UNSCR 1701. Hezbollah maintains that the resolution's restrictions apply only to areas south of the Litani River, whereas opposition factions argue that it mandates nationwide disarmament of all non-state actors. Despite the heavy toll of the conflict, Hezbollah has not admitted defeat and continues to wield considerable political influence. Its long-term military role remains unresolved, and opposition groups, while broadly supportive of full UNSCR 1701 implementation, lack a unified strategy or viable candidates to challenge Hezbollah's dominance in presidential politics.¹³

This dual failure – of both state and non-state authority – has created a rare and urgent opportunity for national renewal through a new round of inclusive dialogue. Such a dialogue must go beyond traditional power brokering and tackle fundamental issues of sovereignty and governance. Key priorities should include building a capable and independent LAF, clearly defining Lebanon's regional role, launching credible economic reconstruction and reform initiatives, and establishing a power-sharing framework that balances communal representation with political stability. Only through such a process can Lebanon begin to restore both its national cohesion and international credibility.

PEACE AND NORMALIZATION

It is in the interests of both the Israeli and Lebanese peoples that Lebanon should emerge from this war as a strong, sovereign state governed by a capable and centralized authority. This vision requires a significant shift in Israeli strategic thinking – one that gradually replaces the current posture of operational freedom over Lebanese airspace with a policy that respects Lebanese sovereignty and empowers those within Lebanon who are committed to stability and reform. Although this represents a sharp departure from the historical pattern of the Israel–Lebanon relationship,

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such a recalibration is essential if the two countries are to move from cyclical conflict toward a durable and comprehensive peace treaty.

From an Israeli perspective, a fully realized peace with Lebanon – supported not only by political elites, but also embraced by civil society – is both achievable and deeply desirable. Recent political shifts in Lebanon have created new opportunities that could reorient bilateral relations: Hezbollah has been significantly weakened, Syria's Bashar al-Assad dictatorship has been replaced by a new regime, and Iran – the traditional patron of both – is weakened following its 12-day war with Israel. A new government in Beirut is showing signs of pursuing a more independent and prosperous future. For the first time in decades, Israeli and Lebanese officials are speaking openly about the possibility of normalizing relations between their respective countries.

¹³ Marsden, O. 2025. "Hezbollah must decide: Disarm, fight on or turn fully to politics." The Observer. July 20. <https://observer.co.uk/news/international/article/disarm-fight-on-or-turn-fully-to-politics-hezbollah-must-decide>.

This moment should be seized, but handled with sensitivity, given the deep wounds the countries have sustained and the grievances held by communities on both sides of the border. Many Lebanese still carry the trauma of Israeli military interventions,¹⁴ while Israelis view Lebanon through the lens of persistent threats from Hezbollah.¹⁵ In addition, normalization cannot be decoupled from the question of Palestinian refugees who have lived in Lebanon for generations. Any path toward peace will need to confront these difficult issues head on, and will require sustained government leadership and active civil society involvement on both sides.

History offers a precedent: in May 1983, a U.S.-mediated agreement brought Israel and Lebanon to a formal peace following the First Lebanon War.¹⁶ Although that treaty ultimately collapsed under regional pressures, its core terms remain instructive – mutual respect for territorial sovereignty, a shared commitment to preventing terrorism, and a framework for the peaceful resolution of disputes. These principles, although decades old, remain the essential building blocks for any future accord.

However, the road to peace will not be simple. The political landscape in Lebanon is deeply fragmented. There are those who categorically deny Israel's right to exist, and efforts to convert them are likely futile. Others, while accepting Israel's existence, are divided – some support a peace agreement outright, while others view normalization as impossible so long as Palestinians are denied a state and continue to suffer under Israeli occupation. A younger generation, shaped by the Gaza wars and international

human rights discourse, increasingly sees Israel as a violator of international norms.¹⁷ This reality makes clear "[...] peace cannot be imposed; it must be cultivated gradually." A long-term, low-profile political process is essential – one rooted in confidence-building measures and closed-door dialogue. Small, issue-specific meetings between Lebanese and Israeli stakeholders could lay the groundwork for more public gestures, each one helping to reshape mutual perceptions. The same kind of engagement and self-reflection must occur in Israel as well. Only by investing in a long-term process that addresses both strategic and emotional barriers can Israel and Lebanon begin to write a new chapter – one of peace, not perpetual war.

14 Travesí, F. and N. El Bejjan. 2024. "From Gaza to Lebanon: The conflict's heavy toll on a fragile country." ICTJ. April 11. <https://www.ictj.org/latest-news/gaza-lebanon-conflicts-heavy-toll-fragile-country>.

15 Elliott, M. 2024. "Israel is trying to move beyond deterrence with Hezbollah." Stimson Center. November 19. <https://www.stimson.org/2024/israel-is-trying-to-move-beyond-deterrence-with-hezbollah/>.

16 Inbar, E. 1991. "Great power mediation: The USA and the May 1983 Israeli-Lebanese agreement." *Journal of Peace Research*, 28(1), 71–84. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/424195>.

17 Cafiero, G. 2025. "Despite Netanyahu's threats and Trump's pressures, here's why the fragile Lebanon-Israel ceasefire will not lead to normalisation." *The New Arab*. March 26. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/lebanon-israel-truce-will-not-lead-normalisation-heres-why>.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

For Israel:

- **Shift from military dominance to respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and support for Lebanese state institutions.** Israel should gradually replace its doctrine of operational freedom – such as routine airstrikes and overflight operations – with a policy that respects Lebanon's territorial sovereignty. This shift should be coupled with support for Lebanese efforts to assert state authority and disarm Hezbollah, particularly by giving space for the Lebanese government and armed forces to implement UNSCR 1701 without excessive interference that could delegitimize them.
- **Support border demarcation and a low-profile normalization process.** Israel should actively pursue a phased strategy to resolve border disputes (including Shebaa Farms, Ghajar, and Naqoura), and support discreet, civil society-led confidence-building measures with Lebanese counterparts. This dual-track approach – combining formal diplomatic negotiations with informal societal engagement – will lay the groundwork for the normalization of relations and lasting peace.

For Lebanon:

- **Empower the LAF and reinforce state sovereignty.** Lebanon should accelerate LAF deployment to the country's south, strengthen control over the Syria–Lebanon border to prevent arms smuggling, and assert state monopoly over the use of force. This includes completing the dismantling of Hezbollah infrastructure and disarming armed factions in Palestinian refugee camps, particularly Hamas and Islamic Jihad, with regional Arab support.
- **Launch comprehensive reconstruction and governance reform.** Lebanon should prioritize transparent and sustainable reconstruction efforts in the south, with oversight mechanisms to prevent Hezbollah from exploiting the process. Politically, the government should launch a new round of an inclusive national dialogue focused on sovereignty, disarmament, and the reform of Lebanon's fragmented power-sharing system, with the aim of re-establishing both its domestic legitimacy and international credibility.

For the international community:

- **Sustain ceasefire monitoring and provide targeted institutional support.** The United States, France, the UN, and regional actors should remain deeply involved in ensuring the ceasefire's implementation. This includes monitoring compliance; facilitating Israel–Lebanon communication; supporting LAF capacity-building; aiding refugee camp disarmament; and financing transparent, corruption-resistant reconstruction initiatives that reduce Hezbollah's political leverage while promoting Lebanese state sovereignty.
- **Move beyond the ceasefire to conflict management.** The United States, Saudi Arabia, and other regional and international actors should encourage Israel and Lebanon to strengthen the 1949 Armistice Agreement and support future initiatives that would enable both parties advance their relationship towards peace.

- **Support discreet, conflict-sensitive societal engagement.** The international community should encourage sustained dialogue efforts bringing together unofficial actors from Israel and Lebanon to begin addressing the historical grievances and legacies of a bilateral relationship marred by conflict and violence. Such initiatives must acknowledge power imbalances and collective traumas in order to ensure that engagement supports the process of healing and does not inadvertently exacerbate existing tensions or derail discussions between governments.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This Policy Brief was developed in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean Initiative (EMI), a dialogue platform that brings together non-governmental experts from around the eastern Mediterranean region. The Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and swisspeace provide substantive and logistical support to the EMI and jointly act as its secretariat. Click [here](#) for more information.

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