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المقاومة

A Farewell to Arms? Challenges and Preconditions for Hezbollah's Demilitarisation

POLICY BRIEF

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Cover: Hezbollah flags over southern Lebanese land.

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Purpose

This briefing note considers whether Hezbollah can be sustainably demilitarised amid the current US-Israel-Iran escalation and its spillover into Lebanon, and what minimum preconditions would be required for demobilisation to hold.

Based on recent interviews with Hezbollah members, southern residents and Lebanese officials, it moves beyond binary debates about the decommissioning of weapons to highlight the environment (*bi'a*) of structural grievances, state absence, and perceived threats to dignity and security, which have sustained armed mobilisation.

It argues that as threat perceptions and the human toll of Israel's retaliation rise, durable progress depends not on a mere technical handover of arms but on the state rapidly demonstrating a credible guarantee of security, livelihoods, and dignity for communities in southern and eastern Lebanon. This would address the social and political wounds that produced and legitimised the entrenchment of the Iran-sponsored resistance movement.



Smoke rising amid cross-border hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in Tyre, southern Lebanon (September 23, 2024).
mhlotfi / Shutterstock.com

Key Findings and Implications

- **Escalation blocks disarmament:** Hezbollah's March 2 strike and Israel's widening campaign deepen insecurity and shrink the space for negotiated demilitarisation.
- **The centre of gravity is the *bi'a*:** Arms persist because of the perceived withdrawal of state capacities, structural grievances and collectively internalised threats to personal safety. Demilitarisation will succeed only if these drivers change.
- **Hezbollah faces a strategic bind:** More open alignment with Tehran invites harsher Israeli retaliation and is bound to result in greater civilian harm. However, it is feared that demonstrating restraint only cements the perception of Hezbollah's capitulation, thereby eroding grassroots legitimacy among the resistance-leaning support base.
- **The post-ceasefire window was missed:** After the last ceasefire with Israel, from November 2024, which was meant to end hostilities, communities expected visible state protection, rapid reconstruction efforts and the restoration of public services. The Lebanese authorities were not able to convert the opportunity of disenchantment with Hezbollah into support for the state, because people were disappointed with or even alienated by the government's inability to provide security guarantees.
- **Constraints on the Lebanese state matter:** Israeli operational restrictions on the movement of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in border zones were seen by interviewees as undermining the state's ability to demonstrate authority and offer protection, weakening its case for establishing a monopoly on the use of force.
- **Quick fixes will not deliver:** Leadership targeting and symbolic arms reductions do not change local incentive structures, and can fuel rearmament or deeper alienation from the formal institutional framework of the state.
- **Perceived humiliation undermines social cohesion and erodes long-term compliance:** Enforced demilitarisation without a nationally accepted security arrangement and a mutually binding border agreement with Israel can be framed as capitulation, especially if they block the return of internally displaced persons (IDP), prevent residents from resuming their livelihoods and fail to recognise the sacrifices of all fallen Lebanese victims.
- **Reintegration is the key operational gap:** As yet there is no credible, scalable pathway for fighters to transition into state security structures or the civilian economy.

Lebanese Context: Why Has Demilitarisation Stalled?

Hezbollah's weapons have long been contested in Lebanese politics and international diplomacy. Since the Taif Agreement of 1989¹ – which set the framework for ending the civil war and for the demobilisation of a number of militias and their entry into politics – Hezbollah's allies have argued that its arms are justifiable in order to resist the remaining Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory, such as the contested Shebaa farms.²

As articulated by the Lebanese historian, Fawwaz Traboulsi, “The country's political authority in 1982 prevented the army from fighting the enemy. That is, the state reached a point – this state itself granted a licence, allowing acceptance that civilians would undertake this mission, and from those civilians one faction transformed into a political party and a military device that achieved liberation. It achieved liberation with Iranian support; upon that, ballistic missiles were placed.”³

Following Hezbollah's post-October 7 intervention and the subsequent Israeli operations in Lebanon, the November 2024 ceasefire agreement,⁴ which ended the recent hostilities, reportedly envisaged both a phased demilitarisation of Hezbollah south of the Litani river and the withdrawal of Israel from occupied Lebanese territory. Interviewees indicate that while the LAF was collecting weapons south of the Litani, Israeli strikes continued in ways local communities perceived as one-sided violations of the ceasefire, and that Israel showed little readiness to withdraw from five contested points in Lebanese territory.

These developments have reinforced views among many southern communities that arms remain the only reliable protection amid weak state presence and continued Israeli pressure. Although there are documented instances of cooperation between the LAF and pro-Hezbollah communities, which enabled the declared completion of the southern Litani disarmament (as stated by the Lebanese army on 8 January 2026),⁵ any further push to disarm Hezbollah north of the Litani will depend on whether the Lebanese state can credibly assume the protective functions that weapons are perceived to provide.

1 The Taif Agreement, September 1989, https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_tauf_agreement_english_version_.pdf.

2 Rami Rayess, “Issue of Shebaa Farms Stirs Heated Debate in Lebanon,” *The Arab Weekly*, May 5, 2019, <https://theArabweekly.com/issue-shebaa-farms-stirs-heated-debate-lebanon>.

3 Al Jazeera News, November 14, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf_GOUoS6sU.

4 Announcement of a Cessation of Hostilities and Related Commitments on Enhanced Security Arrangements and Towards the Implementation of UNSCR 1701, updated November 27, 2024, https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/LB_241126_Announcement_of_a_Cessation_of_Hostilities_and_Related_Commitments.pdf.

5 Al Jazeera Staff and News Agencies, “Lebanon Army Says Phase One of Disarming Non-State Groups in South Complete,” *Al Jazeera*, updated January 8, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/8/lebanons-army-says-phase-one-of-hezbollah-disarmament-in-south-completed>.

However, Hezbollah has publicly made any disarmament north of the Litani conditional on full Israeli withdrawal and the sustained cessation of hostilities.⁶ That stance has been reinforced by the renewed escalation between Israel and Hezbollah and by Israeli military strikes and ground invasion into Lebanese territory. Some reports of largescale evacuation orders for southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs (855 km²), issued by the Israeli army, compare the size of these areas to "most of the southern part of Paris (the Left Bank) or over a third of Manhattan in New York".⁷ This has further intensified insecurity and complicated prospects for demilitarisation.

6 Laila Bassam and Tala Ramadan, "Hezbollah Rejects Disarmament Plan and Government's Four-Month Timeline," *Reuters*, February 17, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hezbollah-rejects-disarmament-plan-governments-four-month-timeline-2026-02-17/>.

7 Enzo Quenescourt, "In Maps: What Israel's Evacuation Order for the Entirety of Beirut's Southern Suburbs Represents," *L'Orient Today*, March 8, 2026, <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1498092/in-maps-what-israels-evacuation-order-for-the-entirety-of-beirut-southern-suburbs-represents.html>.



Resident of Jbaa, Lebanon holding Hezbollah flag in the midst of war debris (March 2026).

Eline Rousset

What Has Changed? Escalation and a Narrower Political Runway

With violence escalating after the coordinated US-Israeli strikes on Iran, a pressing question is how Tehran might leverage its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, and how the party's strategic choices will shape its trajectory within the post-October 7 Lebanese power-sharing system.

Having signalled that any attack on Khamenei would be a red line, Hezbollah – already weakened by recent blows to its military structure – felt pressured to act in order to avoid appearing passive. Its subsequent move, firing into Israel, tied the group more openly to Tehran's fate. Israel's response has been severe and wideranging: a highintensity campaign across the south that has extended into the Bekaa and Dahieh, and has included targeting Beirut's civilian infrastructure.

This new round of violence complicates prospects for demilitarisation, because it raises threat levels and deepens the insecurities that reinforce the perceived need to carry arms.

The escalation in Israeli attacks has also polarised domestic debates around how to tackle the liabilities that Hezbollah's transnational resistance ideology creates, and has narrowed the political space for negotiated, confidencebuilding demilitarisation. For example, the Lebanese authorities have swiftly banned Hezbollah's military⁸ and intelligence activities, and Lebanon's Justice Minister, Adel Nassar, has pushed for legal action against Hezbollah's Secretary General Naim Qassem.⁹

To emphasise the polarisation, remarks by the LAF Commander, Rodolphe Haykal¹⁰ signalled that the army's implementation of the government's decision to demobilise Hezbollah remains contingent on what is interpreted as "appropriate", and emphasised the army's foremost commitment to protecting "internal stability and national unity". His comments have been criticised on multiple social media channels – as well as by Lebanese MPs such as Waddah Sadek¹¹ from the Khat Ahmar block – as challenging the authority of the executive and thereby supporting Hezbollah's interest in stalling disarmament efforts. Adding to the strain, Lebanon's US allies have openly¹² called for Rodolphe Haykal's dismissal.

8 Al Jazeera Staff, "Lebanese PM Bans Hezbollah's Military Activities After Attack on Israel," *Al Jazeera*, March 2, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/2/lebanese-pm-nawaf-salam-announces-ban-on-hezbollah-military-activities>.

9 "Adel Nassar Considering Legal Action Against Naim Qassem, Source Tells L'OLJ," *L'Orient Today*, March 7, 2026, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1497940/adel-nassar-considering-legal-action-against-naim-qassem-source-tells-loj.html>.

10 Lebanese Army (@LebarmyOfficial), X, March 7, 2026, <https://x.com/LebarmyOfficial/status/2030301058585481678>.

11 Waddah Sadek (@WaddahSadek), X, March 7, 2026, <https://x.com/WaddahSadek/status/2030334306707746917>.

12 Mounir Rabih, "Washington Calls for Rodolph Haykal's Dismissal, Beirut Refuses," *L'Orient Today*, March 11, 2026, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1498656/washington-calls-for-rodolph-haykals-removal-beirut-refuses.html>.

This internal polarisation, intensified by outside pressure, highlights that demilitarisation will remain at risk unless the Lebanese state rapidly delivers credible protection guarantees against further Israeli aggression, offers support with reconstruction, and designs dignityrestoring measures for affected populations – specifically the Shi'a communities caught in the crossfire and often treated as hostages by both Hezbollah and its political allies.

Why the *bi'a* Matters: Rockets Are Not the Underlying Problem

From interviews with Hezbollah members, southern residents and Lebanese officials, it is clear that the issue of weapons in the south remains embedded in practices of protection, identity and survival. Arms are often framed locally as a rational response to the perceived abandonment of the central state and the lack of personal safety. Without changes to the security and socioeconomic environment, policies that focus narrowly on arsenal removal are unlikely to achieve lasting results. Communities will rearm, or seek other protectors, if no credible alternative guarantor of security and dignity emerges.

As a member of parliament (MP) from the Amal movement – interviewed during field research in November 2025 – argued, “The southerners are the ones spending their own money on laying the foundations of and rebuilding their houses. Southerners are territorial about their land. There is no way that they will give it up, and they have made very big sacrifices. Yes, there is hopelessness, primarily because southerners still do not feel safe. They are stuck, if you like, between Israeli attacks and greed, and between the state’s failure to completely fulfil its obligation to build a sense of safety for southerners. And this is something I am talking about, not in political terms, but as a civilian.”

Our data confirms that Lebanon’s southern populations are deeply attached to their lands. Proposals for industrialised or demilitarised buffer zones that do not envision the safe return of the displaced and do not allow them to resume their livelihoods will be rejected. The Lebanese government should thus challenge any measure that uses disarmament as a pretext to permanently displace Hezbollah’s presumed support base. Without a preceding domestic political settlement, enforced demilitarisation could be framed as capitulation. This would damage morale among Lebanese Shi’a and strain national cohesion.

Why Decapitation and Cosmetic Disarmament Fail

Firstly, leadership targeting can disrupt command structures, but it does not remove the local incentives that drive small-arms retention and mobilisation. According to Hezbollah members interviewed as part of this project, the elimination of Hezbollah's former Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah, is ultimately not expected to change the armed movement's course or break its will to pursue its resistance mission further: "We have a verse which says, the last thing people want is to die. Allah chooses good people to die, to be martyred. Okay, he was martyred, we will continue with our mission. [...] There is no party whose mission is linked to the life of one person."

Secondly, symbolic weapon reductions can create the appearance of progress without changing the sub-national security calculus. Both approaches ignore the trust deficit between the state and southern communities. If protection, livelihoods and recognition remain uncertain, such measures risk rearmament and deeper alienation from the state's institutional framework.

Hezbollah's Dilemma Is Not the State's Dilemma

There are two challenges which are often conflated. However it is important that they should be kept separate in any analysis. These are:

- **Hezbollah's dilemma is strategic and reputational.** It must balance the external pressures arising from its embedded position in the Iran-sponsored transnational resistance axis against the domestic costs of being blamed nationally for the escalation and potentially alienating its political allies from the Amal movement.
- **The Lebanese state's dilemma is institutional.** Allowing an armed actor to persist, due to fears of evoking civil strife, risks eroding the state's symbolical claim to a monopoly on force. However, rapid demilitarisation without credible guarantees for communities dependent on Hezbollah's arms can increase vulnerability and allow Hezbollah to frame more aggressive forms of intervention as a humiliation against the Lebanese Shi'a and their sacrifices in resisting foreign occupation.

Separating these dilemmas should inform sequencing. Any viable pathway must weaken Hezbollah's opportunity structures for mobilisation, and at the same time visibly strengthen the state's credibility as the primary provider of security and protection. The state can draw lessons from missed opportunities in the aftermath of the November 2024 ceasefire, when Hezbollah's default support base was left vulnerable and exposed in the expectation of visible state protection, rapid reconstruction and restored services.

Political disunity, institutional weakness, and Israeli operational constraints on LAF movement in border zones prevented the state from occupying this space convincingly. Hezbollah exploited the vacuum to draw attention to Israel's impunity and question the government, justifying its own failure to step in by claiming to give the state space to prove itself as the south's sole protector.

As one of the interviewees pointed out, "There is a team that believes that the state was absent. It abandoned the south. And I am part of this team. It abandoned the south [which was] vulnerable to any Israeli attacks, continuous [attacks], to an artificial entity on our southern border, [and] which attaches no importance to international law, international covenants, anything. And the south was abandoned to its fate. So the southerner bore weapons in order to defend himself."

By exposing the costs of Hezbollah's renewed intervention in the war and the sacrifices inflicted first and foremost on those the resistance movement aims to protect, the authorities can reverse the power dynamics in the war of narratives. However, this would require resolve in stopping the Israeli aggression and reaching a breakthrough in planned direct negotiations in Cyprus, thereby guaranteeing Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese territory and its respect for Lebanon's sovereign borders.

With regard to negotiations with Israel, another important insight which should be taken into account is the need to communicate clear parameters for the negotiations and for any concessions made. This would prevent Hezbollah from delegitimising the negotiations as a humiliating capitulation. As the following quote from a Hezbollah MP – interviewed during fieldwork in November 2025 – reveals, the adopted mode of negotiating with Israel has often been criticised as entering talks in good faith without clearly formulated demands meant to safeguard national interests:

“In a national framework or in a government, anyone who wants to talk about compromises should go ahead and tell us what they should be. They go into negotiations, and are left hanging for a week, then under Israeli pressure they offer compromises. They should tell us what the lower limit should be and what the upper limit should be. [...] The concept of negotiation is not a rejected one. Indirect negotiations. [...] Israel is present at five points, and now they are building walls in more than one village, in the heart of Lebanese land. [...] When Barrack and others talking about creating an economic zone in the south of Lebanon, did anyone say that this idea would be rejected? [...] You cannot base negotiations on unknowns.”

As the quote reveals, any designated Lebanese delegation tasked with conducting indirect or direct negotiations should clearly communicate red lines and gains that they have been able to achieve during mediated talks or diplomatic campaigning.

What a Workable Pathway Would Require

There is no silver bullet and no single actor that can deliver demilitarisation. A viable approach would need a phased, conditional pathway anchored in visible Lebanese state performance and backed by international partners. This includes:

1. Immediate, visible protection through a strengthened LAF

A credible security presence in sensitive border districts must be experienced by local communities as protective and dignified, with the support of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) where appropriate. Diplomatic efforts should be made to address constraints on LAF movement arising from Israeli deployments and rules of engagement. The upcoming Paris conference¹³ initiative to strengthen LAF, as prompted by President Macron of France, should build on the momentum generated by the February 2026 Cairo preparatory meeting,¹⁴ and constitute more than a one-off emergency response.¹⁵ It must mobilise sustained, coordinated international support to address the roughly \$9 billion in LAF and security needs outlined ahead of the donor summit. That package should span immediate operational priorities (salaries, maintenance, surveillance and mobility), capability gaps (air, maritime and border surveillance), and longer-term institutional reforms (training, procurement transparency and civilian oversight).

2. Rapid reconstruction and livelihoods

Targeted, time-bound recovery packages (housing, water, power and employment) with transparent independent monitoring and local participation, should be designed and communicated in ways that project state capacity and restore the dignity of affected communities. Lebanon's Gulf partners could be invited and incentivised to contribute financially and support infrastructure investments.

3. Phased demobilisation with credible guarantees

Aligning weapons reduction with measurable community gains – backed by third-party independent monitoring and clear benchmarks – may reduce mistrust.

13 "Lebanon, France Postpone Paris Security and Disarmament Conference Amid Regional Tension," *This Is Beirut*, March 1, 2026, <https://thisisbeirut.com.lb/articles/1332854/>.

14 Rita El Jammal, "Exclusive: Lebanon Seeks \$9bn Boost for Army Ahead of Paris Summit," *The New Arab*, February 27, 2026, <https://www.newarab.com/news/exclusive-lebanon-seeks-9bn-army-ahead-paris-summit>.

15 Reuters, "France to Send Armored Vehicles to Lebanon, Macron Says," *Al-Monitor*, March 5, 2026, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2026/03/france-send-armored-vehicles-lebanon-macron-says>.

4. Reintegration options at scale

Practical pathways should be designed to enable monitored transitions into reformed security institutions or civilian jobs – including training, job creation, and safeguards against sect-based factionalisation and politicisation.

5. Recognition within a broader political settlement

Establish national messaging and legal assurances that honour sacrifices of all Lebanese communities, prohibit collective punishment and the stigmatisation of Hezbollah's traditional support base in the south, and protect the safe return of IDPs and their livelihoods. It is important to note, as the often-cited Northern Ireland analogy shows,¹⁶ that processes work better when parties can avoid a 'surrender' narrative and find a face-saving option to comply with a nationally agreed settlement and post-conflict security arrangement.¹⁷

6. Public Recognition of collective sacrifices

It is important for the Lebanese government to acknowledge the sacrifices of populations from the south through reparations, justice mechanisms and public recognition. As Traboulsi pointed out in an interview in November 2025,¹⁸ when discussing Lebanon's liberation from Israeli occupation, "As a leadership that claims to be a state, in my view it should be more concerned about the south situation, because southerners are not only the people who embraced the militias – they are part of the Lebanese people. It is not from 1948. It is from 1963. From 2003. On the line of fire. It is part of Lebanon. This south was liberated as part of Lebanon, not as a jurisdictional or sectarian area. [...] Hezbollah [fighters] contributed a lot. [...] Meaning that this resistance is southern resistance. I wrote that when the people come down to the frontline villages, they raise the Lebanese flag."

7. Cultivating National Consensus on a New National Defence Framework

Embed any plan for Hezbollah's phased demilitarisation in a broader national defence framework that addresses all weapons outside state control, pre-empting the party's claim of double standards and the argument that its arsenal is being unfairly singled out. This approach would require the LAF to pursue parallel disarmament of remaining Palestinian factions¹⁹ – a process that has already progressed in some refugee camps, following the May 2025 agreement between the Lebanese government and the Palestinian Authority.²⁰

16 Nemtala EDDÉ, "Hezbollah Disarmament: What Can Lebanon learn from Northern Ireland and Colombia," *L'Orient Today*, January 18, 2026, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1491910/hezbollah-disarmament-what-can-lebanon-learn-from-northern-ireland-and-colombia.html>.

17 Deliberately vague disarmament provisions discussed in the context of the Good Friday Agreement had allowed the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to frame the outcome as a negotiated victory rather than a humiliating surrender to the British government, see "The Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement 1998," Northern Ireland Assembly, <https://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post-16/snapshots-devolution/belfast-agreementgood-friday-agreement-1998>.

18 AL Jadeed News, November 14, 2025.

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

20 Rami G. Khouri, "Palestinian Disarmament in Lebanon: Small Steps with Regional Implications," *Arab Center Washington DC*, September 4, 2025, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/palestinian-disarmament-in-lebanon-small-steps-with-regional-implications/>.

Conclusion

Sustainable demilitarisation is not a quick technical fix; it is a social contract requiring demonstrable transfers of security, justice and livelihoods to southern communities. The recent cycle of action and counteraction – specifically Hezbollah's strike on Israel and Israel's intensified campaign – highlights how rapidly the environment can shift against demobilisation prospects. In the absence of rapid, credible action from the Lebanese government and effective regional deescalatory diplomacy, Hezbollah's failed hedging is likely to result in further catastrophic reprisals.

Policymakers must therefore prioritise immediate, visible measures that restore state credibility and offer dignified alternatives to arms, otherwise symbolic disarmament and coercive cycles will perpetuate instability rather than lead to durable peace. As Nadim Houry observes, Lebanon is being forced to “choose between submission to a belligerent Israel, which may lead to permanent displacement, or align with a resistance axis that has brought repeated destruction, dragged Lebanon into never-ending conflicts, including with neighbouring Syria, and deepened internal fragmentation”.²¹

Since neither option resolves the catch-22, rebuilding sovereignty must begin at home. In practical terms, this means bringing Hezbollah's political leadership and its Amal allies into negotiated arrangements and securing their public commitment to deliver concrete guarantees that armed elements will not breach any negotiated settlement.

Finally, any strategy for disarmament must situate Hezbollah's armed presence within the broader regional and domestic context. Its trajectory reflects not only weak state structures but also an ideologically driven response to the predatory behaviour of a neighbour state, whose refusal to respect Lebanese sovereignty and reluctance to withdraw territorially continues to fuel the escalatory rhetoric of the resistance movement and its advocates embedded in the bureaucratic apparatus. Addressing these external drivers – while cultivating a “positive national project”²² around accountable governance, justice and economic reforms – is therefore essential to undercut the rationale for armed mobilisation and build a durable peace.

21 Nadim Houry, “Lebanon Cannot Be Built on Two False Choices: Rethinking Sovereignty, Resistance, and Survival in a Changing Middle East,” *Arab Reform Initiative*, March 6, 2026, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/lebanon-cannot-be-built-on-two-false-choices-rethinking-sovereignty-resistance-and-survival-in-a-changing-middle-east/>.

22 Houry, “Lebanon Cannot Be Built.”



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