

A Window of Opportunity to Increase Pressure on Hezbollah

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Hezbollah—now a defeated force—is under growing pressure from the IDF’s ongoing military campaign to erode its capabilities and hinder its recovery; the unraveling of the Shiite axis; and, most significantly, the growing internal and external calls for the organization to disarm. Yet Hezbollah, clinging to its identity as a resistance movement, refuses to give up its status or objectives and declares it will not disarm. At the same time, it is taking steps to secure a pause in hostilities that would allow time for its recovery. Given this, Israel must sustain its military pressure to weaken Hezbollah—in coordination with the United States—and to advance diplomatic, economic, and psychological efforts against the organization in both the regional and international arenas. In parallel, it is recommended that Israel open communication channels with Lebanon’s new leadership to assist and engage with it while taking into account Beirut’s limitations and concerns over a violent conflict with Hezbollah.

Hezbollah After the War

The Hezbollah that has emerged from the Swords of Iron war is completely different from the organization that existed beforehand. Battered and defeated, it now stands at a crossroads, struggling toward recovery. Most of its political and military leadership has been eliminated, including its dominant leader, Hassan Nasrallah, whose influence extended across the entire Shiite axis. His successor, Naim Qassem, is weak, lacks charisma, and is unable to fill the enormous void Nasrallah left behind.

The organization’s military capabilities have been significantly degraded: According to IDF data, more than 70% of its firepower at various ranges has been neutralized to date, along with a similar proportion of its infrastructure across Lebanon. This includes approximately 80% of the weapons systems of the elite Radwan Force and much of its tunnel network in southern Lebanon. There has also been severe damage to its military personnel: since the war began, about 4,500 military operatives have been killed—including one-third from the Radwan Force—and another 9,000 wounded, together accounting for nearly half of Hezbollah’s regular military force. In addition to its military losses, Hezbollah has also lost economic resources—notably damage to its financial system, including the Al-Qard Al-Hassan Association branches and other institutions. This has made it difficult for the organization to support the recovery of the Shiite population and maintain their support, which was almost absolute before the war.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah has not disappeared and is trying to recover by any means possible. While its military capabilities are now limited, its military and civilian operatives rank in the

tens of thousands, and it continues to enjoy support from the majority of Lebanon's Shiite population. This support was reflected in part in the massive turnout at the funerals of Hassan Nasrallah and his successor, both held on February 23, 2025. Yet even these grand funerals—meant to symbolize the preservation of the organization's strength and status—revealed a shift in Hezbollah's standing. Participation by regional and international actors outside the Shiite axis was limited, and senior figures from Lebanon's new leadership were absent. This leadership had been elected in January–February 2025 largely due to Hezbollah's weakened state. The organization's inability to effectively lead post-war reconstruction has caused disappointment among Lebanon's Shiite community, with 92,000 displaced civilians still unable to return to their homes according to UN data.

The Challenges Facing Hezbollah

Hezbollah's efforts to preserve its remaining capabilities and recover after being forced to accept a ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon are facing mounting obstacles:

- **Continued Israeli military activity.** This near-daily activity, following the ceasefire declared on November 27, 2024, stems from the freedom of action granted to Israel under the terms of the ceasefire agreement with Lebanon, as well as a side letter from the United States. These provisions allow Israel to respond to violations not addressed by the Lebanese army and to immediate threats posed by Hezbollah. As a result, the IDF is severely disrupting Hezbollah's efforts to maintain its presence in southern Lebanon and is steadily eroding its remaining capabilities. Since the ceasefire, over 130 Hezbollah operatives have been eliminated, and the organization's infrastructure has been attacked across Lebanon. This includes a broad wave of strikes on April 20, and multiple strikes in Beirut's Dahiya quarter. On March 28 and April 27, Hezbollah infrastructure there was targeted, and on April 1, an operative allegedly involved in planning attacks on Israeli civilians—according to the IDF—was eliminated.
- **US Pressure in shaping post-war Lebanon.** A US general chairs the five-party committee (comprising Israel, Lebanon, UNIFIL, the United States, and France) responsible for overseeing the ceasefire's implementation. In addition, the United States also supports Israel's actions against Hezbollah. Furthermore, the Trump administration is actively engaging with Lebanon's new leadership—both to support it and to ensure it fulfills its obligations under the ceasefire agreement and beyond, particularly with regard to disarming Hezbollah. During her recent visit to Beirut, Morgan Ortagus, deputy US special envoy to the Middle East, emphasized that while the United States is committed to Lebanon's stability and will aid in its reconstruction, this assistance is contingent on economic reforms and the disarmament of Hezbollah and other militias throughout the country—not just in the south (LBCI, April 16). A similarly strong warning was also delivered on April 2 by the chairperson of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who expressed frustration over the Lebanese army's slow response. According to *Al-Akhbar* on April 10, Arab diplomats reported that the United States also urged Gulf states not to assist Lebanon until it meets these conditions.

- **The weakening—and increasing disintegration—of the Shiite axis.** The Shiite axis has been significantly weakened and is showing signs of disintegration, primarily due to the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the efforts of the new leadership in Damascus to expel both Iran and Hezbollah from the country. These developments have dealt a major blow to Hezbollah, which had enjoyed unrestricted freedom of movement between Syria and Lebanon during Assad’s rule. It used this freedom to transfer weapons from Iran and smuggle drugs from Lebanon into Syria. Iran itself is also facing challenges as it is being drawn into direct confrontation with Israel, re-entering nuclear negotiations with the Trump administration, and struggling to sustain its support for Hezbollah, despite being in its interest to preserve the organization. At the same time, Hamas is struggling in Gaza and the Houthis in Yemen remain targets of extensive attacks.

Domestic Pressures on Hezbollah

In addition to external pressures, Hezbollah is contending with growing internal pressures:

- **Erosion of Hezbollah’s status in Lebanese politics.** Hezbollah’s influence has diminished considerably amid the increasing opposition to the organization and the growing power of its rivals, who have used its weakness to strengthen state institutions and marginalize the concept of “resistance” from the political mainstream. Having lost its dominant position, Hezbollah was compelled to support the election of Joseph Aoun as president on January 9 and failed to block the formation of a government led by Nawaf Salam on February 8. The new government has reduced Hezbollah’s political leverage by abolishing its former “blocking third” in the government. Neither Aoun’s inaugural speech nor the government’s platform included any reference to “resistance” and instead emphasized the state’s exclusive authority over matters of war and peace and asserted its monopoly on the use of arms.

These declarations have been accompanied by actions. Since the ceasefire, Lebanese security forces have sought to prevent Hezbollah from smuggling arms and cash by blocking transit routes to and from Syria and monitoring air and seaports. In early April, 30 airport workers linked to Hezbollah were dismissed, and increased inspections were reported at Beirut’s seaport due to smuggling suspicions. By mid-February, Beirut had also halted flights from Iran over concerns of money smuggling to Hezbollah. Lebanese forces have also cracked down on Hezbollah-linked violence across Lebanon and removed its flags and street signs in Beirut.

- **The Lebanese Army’s enforcement of the ceasefire in Southern Lebanon.** The Lebanese Army’s enforcement has significantly obstructed Hezbollah’s attempts to preserve its remaining weaponry and redeploy its operatives into the region, as it did after the 2006 war. To date, 4,500 additional soldiers have been deployed to the Lebanese Army, out of the 10,000 soldiers that were promised. According to a source close to Hezbollah, 190 out of 265 of its outposts in southern Lebanon have been handed over to the army (AFP, April 12). A Lebanese security official stated on May 2 that over 90% of Hezbollah’s infrastructure in south Lebanon had been dismantled. Even if these reports are exaggerated, the army’s enforcement efforts are clearly more serious than in the past. The Lebanese Army has also acted decisively in tracking those responsible for sporadic rocket fire at Israel in March 2025 and claimed to have thwarted another launch on April 7 from the Tyre area. Surveillance of the border to the

south has also increased. At the same time, the Lebanese Army continues to avoid direct confrontation with Hezbollah and currently focuses on preventing Hamas's activity in Lebanon.

- **Increasing domestic pressure to disarm Hezbollah.** Lebanon's new leadership has openly declared its intention to disarm Hezbollah—a stance rarely expressed so publicly in the past—but still, its steps to implement it are cautious. The political arena and the general public increasingly view the dismantling of Hezbollah's militia as essential for Lebanon's stability and security. In an interview with *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed* on April 15, President Aoun stated that the goal is to place all weapons under state control. He noted that a decision on this matter has already been made and that he expressed hope for its implementation in 2025. Aoun emphasized that this process would not involve force, to prevent civil war, but would occur through dialogue with Hezbollah—coordinated with the speaker of parliament, who is Hezbollah's ally. Aoun proposed that Hezbollah members could be integrated into the army—not as a separate unit but individually after vetting and training.

Hezbollah 2.0—A Revised Strategy

While Hezbollah remains committed to its “resistance” ideology, its weakened state has forced it to adapt its strategy. At the core of its current policy is a commitment to the ceasefire from November 27, 2024, and containment—marked by restraint in response to ongoing IDF actions. Hezbollah claims victory in the war, portraying itself as having saved Lebanon from “Israeli occupation.” At the same time, it insists that the responsibility for confronting Israel now lies with the Lebanese state, which must secure Israel's full withdrawal from Lebanese territory and halt Israeli airstrikes, which Hezbollah views as ceasefire violations. However, senior officials warn that if the state fails to achieve these goals diplomatically, Hezbollah may resume its activities when it deems appropriate. The organization has attempted to retaliate only once—on December 2, 2024—but stopped after a strong IDF response. Since then, Hezbollah has denied responsibility for isolated rocket fire attacks from Lebanon on northern Israel (March 22 and 28), which appear to have been carried out by Palestinian factions.

Hezbollah has requested a pause in the fighting, which will help it focus on its recovery—its top priority—while concealing these efforts publicly, out of fear of disruptions by the IDF. Its recovery includes expanding its dwindling financial reserves, continuing weapons transfers from southern Lebanon, smuggling arms by any means from abroad, recruiting new personnel, reorganizing its institutions, repositioning operatives abroad (hundreds reportedly relocated to South America with their families), and making some efforts to respond to the needs of the Shiite population—all while placing full responsibility for reconstruction on the Lebanese government.

At present, Hezbollah has avoided direct confrontation with Lebanon's new leadership and has projected a façade of cooperation. The organization claims to be complying with UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and the November 2024 ceasefire by withdrawing its military forces from southern Lebanon and coordinating with the Lebanese Army. However, it also emphasizes that the ceasefire agreement applies only to areas south of the Litani River.

Allegedly, Hezbollah has also signaled some openness to discussing disarmament. On April 9, Reuters cited a Hezbollah official who stated that the group was willing to engage on the issue—if Israel fully withdrew from Lebanon and ceased its airstrikes. Although the statement attracted considerable attention, Hezbollah spokespeople subsequently dismissed the idea. On April 18, Secretary-General Naim Qassem firmly declared that Hezbollah would not permit anyone to strip the resistance of its weapons, which he described as essential for defending Lebanon—a country he claimed lacks any other means of protection. Nevertheless, Hezbollah’s leaders have expressed willingness to enter into dialogue with President Aoun about a joint “defense strategy,” but only after a complete cessation of the IDF’s attacks and its full withdrawal from Lebanon.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

While Hezbollah’s ideology and hostility toward Israel remain unchanged, its weakened state—and its desire to avoid renewed conflict in order to focus on recovery—presents Israel with a strategic opportunity to reshape the security environment along its northern border. At the same time, the consolidation of Lebanon’s new leadership provides an opportunity to build a new relationship with Israel based on shared interests, as Aoun’s government seeks to stabilize Lebanon as a pro-Western state while gradually disarming Hezbollah.

However, Lebanon’s limitations in addressing Hezbollah must be acknowledged, including Aoun’s fears of igniting a civil war. A clear gap exists between the ambitious demands of the United States and Israel (especially the full disarmament of all militias and normalization with Israel) and what Lebanon’s leadership can realistically deliver. Therefore, Israel and the United States should take into account Lebanon’s constraints and proceed with caution—especially regarding Hezbollah. Israel should also recognize that the continued IDF presence at five strategic points along the border causes friction—not only with Hezbollah but also with the Lebanese government, which views full Israeli withdrawal as essential to proving that it is capable of addressing the challenge posed by Israel, when Hezbollah continues to claim that the limited IDF presence justifies maintaining the “resistance” and its role as an independent militia.

US involvement is critical—both to sustain Western aid to the Lebanese government and army, in order to distance them from Hezbollah and Iran, and to ensure American support for Israel’s actions against Hezbollah, including within the framework of the five-party ceasefire monitoring committee.

Key Recommendations for Israeli Policy

- Continue military operations to weaken Hezbollah and prevent its return to southern Lebanon, leveraging the operational freedom provided by the ceasefire agreement in order to seize the opportunity to reshape the security reality along the border—while coordinating with and taking into account Lebanon’s leadership constraints.
- Create a graded framework of demands and reciprocal measures. As a first step, Israel should make it clear that the IDF presence at the five strategic points in Lebanon—seized during the war and used by Hezbollah as a pretext—is temporary, and that the IDF will

withdraw from Lebanon once it is confirmed that Hezbollah no longer maintains any military presence in southern Lebanon and that the Lebanese Army has full control over the area south of the Litani River.

- Preserve and develop coordination channels with Lebanon's new leadership and show sensitivity to its internal constraints. It is important not to pressure the Lebanese government to advance relations with Israel before the conditions are ripe. Accordingly, any formal agreements on the permanent demarcation of the land border or changes in the official status of Israel–Lebanon relations should be postponed. The idea of normalization with Lebanon, which was recently raised on the Israeli side, is premature. For this reason, President Aoun prefers to regulate relations between the two countries based on a return to the 1949 armistice agreement.
- Ensure close coordination with the United States—including its administration, the US envoy to Lebanon, and representatives on the five-party ceasefire implementation committee—and work jointly to formulate a phased plan for confronting Hezbollah. This should be done in parallel with advancing aid to the Lebanese Army and state, without making such aid entirely conditional on Hezbollah's disarmament.
- Given Hezbollah's potential expansion abroad, efforts must be made to combat the group politically, economically, and in the information domain on the international stage—targeting its income sources and curbing its activities. It is suggested that an initiative be promoted for both regional cooperation (with Jordan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and even Syria) and international collaboration (Interpol, European Union, United States, Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil) to thwart Hezbollah's drug trafficking and money laundering operations.

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