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The Iran–Israel Standoff over Lebanon: A Truly United Front?

Unit for Political Studies

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Unit for Political Studies

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On 8 June, Iran and Israel carried out reciprocal strikes in their first direct confrontation since the ceasefire agreement concluded on 8 April 2026 came into force.¹ The escalation began with an Israeli airstrike on 7 June targeting a facility that Israel claimed belonged to Hezbollah in Beirut's Dahieh suburb. This took place in the context of Israel's ongoing offensive against Lebanon, which has continued for more than two years. Notably, Lebanon is included in the ceasefire agreement between Washington and Tehran, announced by the Prime Minister of Pakistan last April and subsequently reaffirmed in the agreement reached between Lebanon and Israel during the first round of direct negotiations between the two in Washington under US auspices. Iran had previously warned that it would intervene militarily if Israel targeted the Beirut suburbs; accordingly, it launched several waves of missiles towards Israel. Israel responded with counter-strikes targeting a petrochemical facility in south-west Iran, along with other military sites.² Although US intervention quickly de-escalated the conflict, amid concerns about jeopardizing negotiations between Tehran and Washington, this latest eruption underscored the difficulty of separating US–Iran negotiations from the war in Lebanon, something Israel appears intent on entrenching, but which Tehran rejects.

Background

Two days after the outbreak of the US–Israeli war on Iran on 28 February 2026, which began with the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei along with a number of his senior security and military aides, Hezbollah entered the war in support of Iran, on the one hand, and to alter the equations imposed by Israel in the ceasefire that ended the Gaza support war on 27 November 2024, on the other. That ceasefire had effectively been observed unilaterally, as Israel continued over the following fifteen months to target Hezbollah fighters and field commanders without any response. At the time, Hezbollah stated unambiguously that the operation – during which rockets and drones were launched towards the city of Haifa – was carried out “in revenge” for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and in defence of Lebanon, and as part of a “legitimate defensive” response in light of the continued Israeli attacks on Lebanon over the preceding fifteen months.³ This conflict has observed a markedly high degree of coordination in the missile attacks carried out by both Iran and Hezbollah. Moreover, while Iran insisted that the ceasefire agreement announced on 8 April 2026 should include the war in Lebanon, Israel has refused Iranian attempts to link the Lebanese arena to negotiations between Tehran and Washington.

In an effort to pre-empt Iran, Israel agreed to a proposal originally put forward by Lebanese President Joseph Aoun at the outset of the Israel–Hezbollah war on 9 March 2006, to begin direct talks with Israel in exchange for a ceasefire, an initiative Israel had previously ignored. Moreover, through the negotiations held in Washington under its auspices, Israel sought to draw Lebanon into a

¹ "Israel and Iran: Missile Exchanges and Airstrikes in a New Round of Fighting," *Al-Araby TV*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNM7N>

² "Israel attacks southern suburbs, targeting Hezbollah headquarters," *Al Jazeera*, 7/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMkm>

³ "Israel-Iran War Highlights: West Asia Crisis Widens as Iran-Backed Groups Join Offensive - All That Has Happened till Now", *Times Now News*, 3/3/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026 at: <https://acr.ps/hBy1Cfi>

peace agreement under which the Lebanese Army would become a partner in the disarmament of Hezbollah. Israel did not adhere to the US-announced ceasefire announced on 16 April, during the first round of negotiations between the two sides, and continued bombing and displacing residents of southern villages and towns.⁴ Since 16 April 2026, Israel has carried out nearly 3,500 airstrikes on Lebanon, in addition to hundreds of demolitions.⁵

Nevertheless, negotiations between Lebanon and Israel continued across four rounds held in Washington (on 14 and 23 April 2026, 14–15 May, and 2–3 June 2026), in addition to security talks held at the Pentagon on 29 May, with the participation of military delegations from both sides. The fourth round concluded with the announcement of a roadmap for implementing a ceasefire, which Hezbollah rejected on the grounds that it did not include the south and sought to entrench a “suburbs-for-northern settlements” equation.

The Trump administration sought to help entrench this equation, which leaves Israel with freedom of action in the south, by claiming it had halted an Israeli plan to launch large-scale strikes on Beirut in response to Hezbollah’s continued rocket fire on the northern settlements. Trump subsequently announced a partial ceasefire that included an Israeli “commitment” not to target Beirut, in exchange for Hezbollah halting attacks on border towns on the Israeli side. This announcement came just hours after Benjamin Netanyahu had ordered the army to strike Dahieh, prompting a mass displacement of residents from the area. Despite earlier understandings that had effectively exempted these suburbs from targeting, Israel has continued to strike them whenever it has chosen to do so. The most recent such strike prior to latest outbreak occurred on 28 May, when Israeli aircraft carried out a raid on Beirut targeting the commander of Hezbollah’s missile unit.

Iran’s Appearance on the Front Lines in Lebanon

Following Hezbollah’s rejection of the agreement reached during the fourth round of negotiations, held in Washington on 2–3 June 2026 and involving Lebanese, Israeli and US officials, the pace of Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon intensified, leading to the displacement of residents from dozens of villages. Hezbollah rejected the latest ceasefire deal because it was conditional on halting its attacks on Israel and required it to evacuate all its forces from the area south of the Litani River, without, in return, stipulating a comprehensive and immediate cessation of hostilities or imposing clear restrictions on Israel’s freedom of military movement in the south.⁶

Iran sought to make ceasefire in Lebanon a prerequisite for its negotiations with Washington. But as Israeli attacks intensified, the Iranian position became increasingly awkward. Hezbollah had entered the war with Israel in support of Iran, while Tehran had concluded a ceasefire agreement that was

⁴ “Aoun Launches Initiative Calling for Direct Negotiations with Israel”, *Al-Akhbar*, 9/3/2026, accessed on 7/5/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9B9i9>

⁵ “Minister: Israel bombed Lebanon about 3,500 times during the ceasefire”, *Reuters*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMu5>

⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Joint Statement of the United States of America, Republic of Lebanon, and State of Israel on the Latest High-Level Trilateral Meeting*, 3/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNM8c>

not effectively implemented in Lebanon, despite its formal inclusion. This left Lebanon facing Israeli attacks largely on its own and exposed Iran to sharp criticism, including from Hezbollah's own supporters. As a result, Iran gradually moved towards greater involvement in the confrontation unfolding in Lebanon. When Netanyahu threatened to bomb Dahieh, the Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement affirming that a ceasefire in Lebanon must form part of any agreement to end the war.⁷ When Netanyahu again threatened to target Hezbollah sites in Beirut in response to drone attacks in northern Israel, Iran warned it could suspend peace talks with the United States and resume attacks on Israel.⁸

Trump, keen to preserve diplomatic negotiations with Iran and pursue an agreement that would reopen the Strait of Hormuz and facilitate understandings on Iran's nuclear programme, moved to pressure Netanyahu to halt his threats to strike Beirut. Nevertheless, on 7 June 2026, Israel carried out a strike on Dahieh, citing the launch of two projectiles from Lebanon towards northern settlements, despite Hezbollah not claiming responsibility. The attack was a moment of truth for Iran, regarding the credibility of its threats to retaliate if Dahieh was targeted. Washington, despite Israel's claim that it had been informed in advance, quickly denied any coordination. Trump stated that the recent Israeli strikes against Hezbollah targets in Beirut had not been coordinated with the US. At the same time, he affirmed that Washington supports Israel "defending itself" against Hezbollah and endorsed "surgical strikes" against Hezbollah in Beirut, while making clear to Netanyahu that he would not accept a large-scale Israeli assault on the city.⁹

For its part, Iran, through its Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei, stated that Israeli actions in Lebanon, whether carried out with or without US approval, were intended to undermine diplomatic talks. It added that Washington, as a party to the ceasefire agreement of 8 April, bears direct responsibility for any violations of that agreement, including attacks attributed to Israel.¹⁰ The rapid entry of the Houthis into the conflict between Israel and Iran further increased pressure on President Trump to contain the escalation. The Houthis announced immediately after Israel's response to Iranian strikes that they would move to halt Israeli maritime navigation in the Red Sea, and claimed responsibility for the first missile attack on Israel since the ceasefire came into effect.¹¹ Their actions highlighted the potential to expand pressure on global trade and energy flows by affecting two of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints: the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab. As a result, the escalation did not last long. Less than a day after the exchange of missile

7 "Iranian Foreign Ministry: A ceasefire in Lebanon is an integral part of any agreement to end the war", *Tasnim News Agency*, 1/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMGf>

8 "Iran Warns Residents of Northern Israel of Attacks in Response to Beirut Threat... and Trump Responds to Reports of Suspended Negotiations", *Euronews*, June 1, 2026, accessed June 10, 2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNLOK>

9 "Iran and Israel Halt Exchanges of Fire", *The Wall Street Journal*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNLMj>

10 "Iran Accuses US of Coordinating Attacks with Israel", *Al Jazeera*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMdS>

11 "Houthis Target Jaffa with Missiles and Ban Israeli Shipping in the Red Sea", *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNLLU>

strikes, both Israel and Iran announced a halt to their attacks following a call by President Trump urging them to “cease fire immediately”.¹²

A United Front?

Despite Washington’s swift move to contain the latest round of confrontations, both Iran and Israel have left the door open to renewed escalation. Iran has made clear that it will resume its strikes if Israel continues to target Lebanon.¹³ A statement by the unified command of the Iranian armed forces (Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters) warned that continued aggression and hostile acts, including in southern Lebanon, will be met with “a harsher and more destructive response.”¹⁴

For its part, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz warned that any “attack on the northern communities will lead to an attack in Dahiyeh”, stressing that any “Iranian attempt to link Lebanon and Iran and attack Israel will be met with great force”.¹⁵ Netanyahu likewise pledged a forceful response to any future attacks carried out by Iran.¹⁶ These Iranian and Israeli statements regarding Lebanon reflect each side’s determination to impose new rules of engagement. While Iran has once again reaffirmed its commitment to the “unity of fronts” principle, signalling that it would intervene again should Israel resume strikes on Dahieh, Israel has sought to entrench a new reality in Lebanon, trying to force the equation of Dahieh for its northern settlements. In doing so, it seeks to confine the fighting entirely within Lebanese territory and insulate Israel’s domestic front from the conflict.

If it has become clear that Iran is seeking to place a halt to the war on Lebanon at the forefront of any agreement with Washington, for the reasons outlined earlier, Israeli operations in the south continue unabated, encompassing entire cities such as Tyre, alongside repeated threats to advance towards Nabatieh and even strike Beirut’s southern suburbs. US policy, meanwhile, is likely to continue attempting to balance its desire to secure negotiation success with Iran and, on the other hand, enabling Israel to retain freedom of action against Hezbollah in Lebanon and pressuring Lebanon to sign a peace treaty with Israel as part of the so-called “Abraham Accords”.

Conclusion

The latest wave of reciprocal attacks between Iran and Israel mark a significant development, not only in military terms, but also in the political implications for Lebanon’s position within the regional negotiating framework. These attacks amounted to an Iranian attempt to reassure its

¹² “After a Night of Clashes... Iran and Israel Announce a Halt to Mutual Attacks”, *Al Jazeera*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMqr>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “A New Security Belt for the Resistance... and Israel, After Halting Attacks with Iran: Our Mission Against Hezbollah Is Not Over,” *Annahar*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMb2>

¹⁵ Emanuel Fabian, “Rejecting Iran’s Threats, Katz Says any Hezbollah Attack on Israel will lead to IDF Strikes in Beirut,” *The Times of Israel*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMD0>

¹⁶ Nava Freiberg, “Netanyahu Called off Major Iran Strike after Trump Warned Israel would be on Its Own - Reports,” *The Times of Israel*, 8/6/2026, accessed on 10/6/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMnB>

allies, foremost among them Hezbollah, as questions had been mounting about the extent of Tehran's commitment after its entry into the war in support of Iran against US–Israeli aggression. Iran's response thus served to signal that its allies were not alone, and that the understandings under discussion with Washington would not come at their expense. By contrast, Israel's responses revealed a clear determination to separate its aggressive actions in Lebanon from the negotiating track between Tehran and Washington, while entrenching a new equation that leaves it with a free hand in southern Lebanon, alongside a “Dahieh-for-the north” equation, replacing the previous open-ended conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Iran and Hezbollah sought to break this equation by rejecting the exclusion of the south from the ceasefire and thwarting Israeli attempts to remove it from the regional negotiating framework. However, Israel continued its attacks unabated, even as negotiations proceeded with the Lebanese government, which agreed to engage under these conditions.

The latest round of escalation did not produce a decisive strategic shift so much as return the parties to where they were standing before. Iran has not succeeded in fully linking the Lebanon question to US–Iran understandings, nor has Israel managed to separate the two completely. As a result, the situation is likely to remain precarious and prone to renewed flare-ups, with Lebanon set to remain one of the principal arenas in which the future of negotiation and conflict between Iran on the one hand, and the United States and Israel on the other, will be determined.