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Lebanon's Hard Choices:

Israeli Aggression and the Washington Ceasefire

Unit for Political Studies

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Unit for Political Studies

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Following the announcement of a temporary ceasefire between the United States and Iran, US President Donald Trump announced, on 16 April 2026, a ten-day truce in Lebanon, set to come into effect the following day.¹ Under the original ceasefire agreement concluded between Iran and the US, under Pakistani mediation, Lebanon was meant to be included. However, Israel and the United States reneged on this clause, insisting on separating the course of the war on Lebanon from the war on Iran.² To this end, Washington subsequently announced the launch of direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel. The first session was held at ambassadorial level at the US Department of State two days before the truce between Hezbollah and Israel was announced. This timing gave the impression that the ceasefire agreement was the outcome of those negotiations.

Lebanon and the Iran War

Two days after the joint US–Israeli aggression against Iran on 28 February 2026, Hezbollah entered the war, launching a salvo of rockets from southern Lebanon towards the Mishmar HaCarmel missile defence site south of Haifa at dawn on 2 March 2026. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack in a written statement, framing it as retaliation for the assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and “in defence of Lebanon and its people”.³ The attack marked Hezbollah’s first rocket fire against Israel in 15 months, despite ongoing Israeli strikes against it throughout that period. Despite entering the war in an apparent act of solidarity with Iran, Hezbollah also sought to take advantage the conflict to alter the balance of deterrence that Israel had imposed after the ceasefire agreement of 27 November 2024.

During that period, Israel systematically and unilaterally violated the ceasefire, carrying out hundreds of attacks against Hezbollah sites and targets, resulting in the deaths of around 500 of its fighters and field commanders, including Haytham Ali Tabatabai, the party’s Chief of Staff and a member of its Jihad Council, without any response from Hezbollah.⁴ Hezbollah, which had pledged to uphold the ceasefire, found itself constrained by internal Lebanese considerations. It was also weakened by the heavy blows it had sustained on its support front during the war on Gaza. At the same time, the group sought to preserve, and possibly rebuild, what remained of its military and moral strength. This came in the aftermath of the killing of several of its most prominent political, military, and security leaders, foremost among them its former Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah. Meanwhile, Israel was targeting Hezbollah’s military capabilities and personnel without facing retaliation. Together with the US, it was increasing pressure on Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and the government formed under Prime Minister Nawaf Salam in early 2025. This pressure aimed to push the Lebanese Army

¹ Barak Ravid & Dave Lawler, “Trump Announces 10-day Ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon”, *Axios*, 16/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNM8b>

² “Shehbaz Sharif”, X, 8/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMkK>

³ “In Response to Israeli Aggression, the Islamic Resistance Targets the Enemy Army's Mishmar HaCarmel Missile Defence Site”, *Al-Manar*, 2/3/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9B9Vq>

⁴ “Hezbollah's ‘second man’... Who was Tabatabai, assassinated in an Israeli airstrike on Beirut's Southern Suburbs?”, *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 23/11/2025, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMxj>

to participate in Hezbollah's disarmament, culminating in a recent government decision to ban its military wing. At a session held on 7 August 2025, the government approved the terms of a proposal submitted by US envoy Thomas Barrack to consolidate the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, reached on 27 November 2024, which included a timetable for the disarmament of Hezbollah.⁵

In an attempt to spare Lebanon from entering a new war, the government, only hours after Hezbollah's attack on Israel on 2 March 2026, hastily convened a session chaired by President Aoun, and issued a decision stressing Lebanon's rejection of any military action launched from its territory, while affirming that the decision of war and peace must rest solely with the state. The decision also called for the immediate prohibition of Hezbollah's security and military activities.⁶ Aoun had pre-empted the cabinet meeting by describing Hezbollah's action as "reckless", as it exposed Lebanon to the risk of being dragged into a regional conflict, according to his statement. This position was also echoed by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, who pledged to protect the Lebanese people.⁷

Israeli Aggression

Israel continued to violate the November 2024 ceasefire agreement, and exploited Hezbollah's attacks to launch a large-scale offensive on Lebanon. It mobilized around five military divisions for the operation, setting a clear objective: to occupy the area between the border and the Litani River and permanently expel Hezbollah from it. Israel had repeatedly warned that if the Lebanese government did not undertake the disarmament of Hezbollah and remove it from south of the Litani, it would carry out the task itself.⁸

Israel, which was surprised by Hezbollah's performance and its retention of significant combat capabilities despite the strikes it had sustained over more than two years of fighting, resorted to replicating the Gaza model in Lebanon. It declared entire areas south of the Litani uninhabitable and displaced more than one million Lebanese from them, after levelling entire villages to the ground. The bombardment also extended to Beirut's southern suburbs, the Bekaa Valley, and other parts of the country, targeting anything associated with Hezbollah, including its financial, social, and educational institutions.

On 9 March 2026, Aoun put forward an initiative to end the war, based on a comprehensive ceasefire as a prerequisite for any settlement. The proposal called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from

5 "Lebanon Seeks a State Monopoly on Arms: Political and Security Implications", Situation Assessment, ACRPS, 13/8/2025, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy1CJB>

6 "Lebanon Bans Hezbollah's Military Activities and Demands It Surrender Its Weapons", *Al Jazeera Net*, 2/3/2026, accessed 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9B9DF>. Following a cabinet meeting, Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam stated, "The Lebanese state declares its absolute and unequivocal rejection of any military or security actions originating from Lebanese territory outside the framework of its legitimate institutions. The state affirms that the decision of war and peace rests solely with itself. This necessitates the immediate prohibition of all Hezbollah's security and military activities, as they are illegal, and obligates it to surrender its weapons to the state and confine its activities to the political sphere, within constitutional and legal frameworks, thereby reinforcing the state's monopoly on weapons and strengthening its full sovereignty over its territory".

7 "Nawaf Salam Warns against 'Reckless Adventurism'", *Arabian Week*, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9B9XM>

8 "'Like Gaza': Israel Said Planning 'Massive' South Lebanon Ground Invasion to Uproot Hezbollah", *The Times of Israel*, 14/3/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMhv>

Lebanese territory and the redeployment of the Lebanese Army along the international border, enabling the state to assert its authority in the south and address the issue of weapons outside state control. In return, it envisaged direct negotiations with Israel under international sponsorship to reach permanent security arrangements and bring an end to the state of conflict between the two sides.⁹ However, Israel ignored the Lebanese proposal and insisted on continuing the war to achieve its objectives. When initiatives containing concessions without guaranteed reciprocal gains are presented from a position of weakness, the stronger party tends to ignore them, waiting for further concessions later. Israel had long desired direct negotiations with Lebanon; once these were offered unconditionally, it did not even deem it necessary to respond.

During the war, some Lebanese media outlets adopted explicit positions that went beyond holding Hezbollah fully responsible for the war or absolving Israel of responsibility for its aggression. These positions extended to calls for full normalization with Israel, and even alliance with it. Such stances reflected not only a political disagreement over Hezbollah's entry into the war in early March, but also a deeper political, psychological, and cultural hostility – reminiscent of the kind of rhetoric not seen since the Lebanese civil war. After 45 days of intense confrontation with Hezbollah, Israel failed to fully occupy the south of the Litani region. It was ultimately forced, under US pressure, to accept a ceasefire while retaining a security buffer zone (referred to as the “yellow line”, mirroring the terminology used in Gaza), and to begin direct negotiations with the Lebanese government aimed at separating the Lebanese theatre of war from that of Iran. This was intended to pave the way for a peace agreement between Lebanon and Israel, as part of Donald Trump's efforts to expand the Abraham Accords launched during his first term, making Lebanon the first country to join them in his second term.

Washington Negotiations

The meeting held at ambassadorial level in Washington on 14 April 2026 marked the first direct negotiations between Israel and Lebanon since those conducted in 1993 under the framework of the Madrid Peace Conference on the Middle East. Shortly before Trump's announcement of a ceasefire agreement in Lebanon, the US State Department published the full text of the memorandum of understanding reached between the Lebanese and Israeli delegations. It included preliminary understandings providing for a cessation of hostilities as of 16 April 2026, “to create the conditions necessary for good-faith negotiations toward enduring peace and security”.¹⁰ It also stipulated that “Israel shall preserve its right to take all necessary measures in self-defense, at any time, against planned, imminent, or ongoing attacks”, while committing not to “carry out any offensive military operations against Lebanese targets, including civilian, military, and other state targets, in the territory of Lebanon by land, air, and sea”. The memorandum further indicated that, upon the ceasefire

9 “Aoun Launches Initiative Calling for Direct Negotiations with Israel”, *Al-Akhbar*, 9/3/2026, accessed 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9B9i9>

10 “Ten Day Cessation of Hostilities to Enable Peace Negotiations Between Israel and Lebanon”, Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State 16/4/2026, accessed 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy1CNi>

coming into force, “with international support, the Government of Lebanon will take meaningful steps to prevent Hezbollah and all other rogue non-state armed groups in the territory of Lebanon from carrying out any attacks, operations, or hostile activities against Israeli targets”.

Trump subsequently announced a ten-day ceasefire in Lebanon, stating in a post on Truth Social that he had instructed his Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine to “work with Israel and Lebanon to achieve lasting peace”. In a subsequent post, he said he would invite Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Aoun to the White House for “the first serious talks between Israel and Lebanon since 1983”, referring to the negotiations that led to the signing of the 17 May 1983 Agreement between Israel and Lebanon. That agreement ultimately collapsed following Syrian opposition and its rejection by several influential Lebanese political forces, who considered it an act of capitulation resulting from Israel’s direct occupation of Lebanon, including the capital.¹¹

Hezbollah rejected the outcomes of the Washington negotiations, describing them as free concessions to Israel, and stressed that any de-escalation should not grant Israel “freedom of action” inside Lebanese territory, insisting that the continued Israeli military presence justified the “right of resistance”.¹² While adhering to the ceasefire, Hezbollah maintained that the agreement was the result of the resilience of its fighters in the south and the pressure exerted by Iran on the US through its closure of the Strait of Hormuz, rather than an outcome secured by the Lebanese government’s direct negotiations with Israel. This underscores the deep divide between Lebanese actors regarding the nature and interpretation of the conflict.

Israel’s Plans for the South

Trump’s announcement of a ceasefire agreement in Lebanon generated significant controversy within Israel, where there was broad opposition to ending the war before its objectives had been achieved. Although Netanyahu welcomed the agreement, describing it as a diplomatic opportunity to reach a “historic peace deal”, he stressed that military operations had not yet achieved all their goals, reaffirming the continuation of efforts to dismantle Hezbollah despite the ceasefire entering into force.¹³ He also indicated that “that progress depended on the disarmament of Hezbollah – a goal that has long eluded Israel and the Lebanese government”.¹⁴

Accordingly, on 18 April, the Israeli army announced the establishment of a demarcation line known as the “Yellow Line” in southern Lebanon, modelled on the line adopted in the Gaza Strip, and stated its

¹¹ “Trump: 10-day Ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel includes Hezbollah”, *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 16/4/2026, accessed 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNM4W>

¹² “Aoun Outlines Lebanon’s Position on Negotiations with Israel... and Hezbollah’s Hands Are on the Trigger,” *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 17/4/2026, accessed 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMDN>

¹³ “Israel army says it established ‘yellow line’ in Lebanon, as in Gaza,” *Le Monde*, 28/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMnZ>

¹⁴ Euan Ward et al., “10-Day Cease-Fire between Israel and Lebanon Goes Into Effect,” *The New York Times*, 16/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMef>

intention to carry out strikes against individuals suspected of approaching it.¹⁵ This approach reflects a distinct Israeli interpretation of the ceasefire, granting Israel freedom of action against Hezbollah, and signalling a move to reshape the security environment along the border by replicating the Gaza model. This carries implications that go beyond the military dimension, extending to the demographic structure of southern Lebanon. Media reports have pointed to Israeli plans for extensive demographic changes in the region, targeting around 55 towns and villages within a security belt ranging from 4 to 10 kilometres along the border, whose residents have been prevented from returning. This approach is also linked to a broader security vision based on statements by Netanyahu regarding the establishment of a buffer zone extending from southern Lebanon to the Yarmouk Basin in Syria, thereby creating a contiguous geographical area of Syrian and Lebanese border regions under full Israeli control. This policy is accompanied by forced displacement operations north of the Litani River, within an escalating framework that previously envisaged consolidating control south of the river, with the possibility of later advancing towards what is known as the Zahrani line.¹⁶

Accordingly, Israel continued its military operations in southern Lebanon, destroying homes in several areas to prevent residents from returning in spite of the ceasefire. The Israeli army justified these operations by claiming that fighters were approaching areas where its forces were deployed, describing this as an “imminent threat” and asserting that “actions taken in self-defence and to remove immediate threats are not restricted by the ceasefire”.¹⁷ This renders the truce largely indistinguishable from the 27 November 2024 agreement, as it contains vague provisions that allow Israel to interpret it in line with its own objectives and to violate it at will.

Israel also confirmed that its forces would remain in the areas it had occupied in southern Lebanon during the ceasefire period, and that the area south of the Litani River would be “off limits to Hezbollah”. In this context, Israel considers a large proportion of southern residents to be affiliated with the group, and thus a major obstacle to its objective of maintaining control over wide areas south of the Litani.¹⁸

Conclusion

Lebanon, under mounting US pressure to draw it into the trajectory of the Abraham Accords, and in light of Israeli ambitions to establish a zone of influence in southern Lebanon, faces a difficult situation that presents it with two stark options: either the continuation of Israeli aggression under the pretext of dismantling Hezbollah’s infrastructure and disarming it, or the risk of descending into civil conflict under US–Israeli pressure to forcibly disarm the group. This situation makes the need

15 “Israel army says it established ‘yellow line’ in Lebanon, as in Gaza,”

16 “Through the Interactive Map... What Are the Boundaries of the ‘Yellow Line’ in Southern Lebanon?”, *Al Jazeera*, 18/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNMAy>

17 “Israel Says Established a ‘Yellow Line’ in Lebanon, As it has in Gaza”, *Al Jazeera*, 18/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNLJ3>

18 “5 Questions about the Lebanese Truce: Steps and Consequences,” *Al Jazeera*, 17/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBxNLVC>



for a Lebanese national dialogue more urgent than ever, in order to deny Israel the opportunity to pit Lebanese factions against one another. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that Hezbollah faces limits in its ability to adhere unconditionally to its weapons in the face of mounting internal and international pressure, both on the party and on the government. This is a reality even Hezbollah itself appears to recognize, having affirmed that it is “open to the fullest cooperation with the Lebanese authorities on a new page based on achieving the sovereignty of our nation Lebanon, within the framework of unity, preventing sedition, and investing the capabilities of strength within a national security strategy”.¹⁹

¹⁹ “Sheikh Qassem: Battlefield has proven to be decisive factor, and next step is implementation of five points”, *Saba Net*, 18/4/2026, accessed on 21/4/2026, at: <https://acr.ps/hBy1CQZ>