

Is The Lebanese Army Equipped To Confront Hezbollah?



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Lebanon stands today at a decisive crossroads, with its sovereignty under direct and pressing threat. At the heart of this challenge lies Hezbollah, a non-state actor frequently characterised as a “state within a state.” In this context, on Aug. 5 2025, the Lebanese government issued a landmark directive mandating the Lebanese Army to devise an implementation plan that would establish the state’s exclusive monopoly over arms. The plan stipulates that weapons should be restricted solely to official state institutions, in line with the ceasefire arrangements reached with Israel on Nov. 27 2024. According to the decision, the Lebanese Army must submit its plan before the end of the current month, with full implementation scheduled by the close of the year. This move marks a strategic inflexion point, compelling Hezbollah to confront a difficult set of choices—all of which carry significant costs. These include voluntary disarmament, a shift toward political transformation, or the prospect of direct military confrontation with the Lebanese Army.

The decision unequivocally targets non-state armed groups, foremost among them Hezbollah. The organisation has rejected the resolution outright, denouncing it as illegitimate and affirming its intention to defy it. Hezbollah has framed disarmament as a direct threat to Lebanon’s capacity for resistance against external aggression. Against this backdrop, the analysis examines the implications of the government’s decision by assessing the respective military structures and capabilities of Hezbollah and the Lebanese Army, exploring the mechanisms through which Hezbollah seeks to undermine state authority, and considering potential scenarios for confrontation between the two sides.

The Political and Social Landscape in Lebanon

Lebanon’s political and social fabric is defined by a distinctive and highly complex sectarian system. The constitution formally recognises 18 religious sects, with political authority apportioned among the leaders of the principal confessional groups. This arrangement has entrenched sectarianism across virtually all aspects of national life, shaping civil and legal rights, the establishment of political parties, the distribution of government posts, and even the trajectory of development planning. The Civil War of 1975–1990 further entrenched these divisions, as militias organised along sectarian lines vied for power and control. This period profoundly reshaped Lebanon’s political and social order.



The Taif Agreement of the early 1990s represented an effort at national reconciliation and formally brought an end to the conflict. Yet it notably excluded Hezbollah from the broader disarmament of militias, granting the group political cover to retain its arsenal on the grounds of resisting Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon and contested border territories. In the decades that followed, this exemption enabled Hezbollah to expand its influence, consolidating both military and political dominance. What began as a sectarian militia gradually evolved into a powerful political and security actor, operating well beyond the boundaries typically imposed on non-state entities.

Today, Hezbollah constitutes a fully integrated security, political, and social system within Lebanon. No longer confined to the role of an armed faction, the group presides over an expansive network of service-oriented institutions, including hospitals, schools, and agricultural centres. It also administers a wide array of economic activities, encompassing commercial enterprises and extensive financial networks. Beyond these domains, Hezbollah maintains a prominent presence within both the Lebanese Parliament and the Council of Ministers, affording it formal political leverage. This influence enables the group not only to shape national policy but also, at times, to obstruct the decision-making process entirely. Alongside its overt political and social roles, Hezbollah is also implicated in illicit economic activities such as drug trafficking and money laundering. These practices compound the complexity of its relationship with the Lebanese state, particularly given the government's limited capacity to assert full sovereignty over its territory and institutions.

The disarmament of Hezbollah is not merely a military undertaking; it represents a profound political and societal transformation with far-reaching consequences for Lebanon's national fabric. Such a shift requires the state to demonstrate its capacity to assume responsibility for the security, service, and political roles that Hezbollah's removal would leave behind. This entails providing credible and reliable alternatives capable of commanding public trust and meeting the daily needs of citizens. Should the state fail to do so, the outcome could be a perilous power vacuum, creating space for other non-state actors to emerge and fuelling renewed cycles of instability. It would also risk further undermining public confidence in state institutions and their ability to safeguard rights, uphold freedoms, and deliver essential services. In this sense, the question of Hezbollah's disarmament ranks among the most formidable challenges confronting Lebanon in its pursuit of a stable, civilian-led state.



Who Holds Power in Lebanon?

As of 2025, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are ranked 115th out of 145 in the Global Firepower Index. The army's strength consists of approximately 60,000 active-duty soldiers, supported by 35,000 reservists and an estimated 65,000 members of paramilitary forces. The annual military budget stands at around one billion USD. Yet this figure offers a misleading impression of investment in modernisation and capability-building. Nearly half of the budget is consumed by salaries and recurring operational costs, including healthcare, fuel, and food. This allocation leaves limited scope for capital investment in advanced weaponry, equipment, and technological development, thereby constraining the army's ability to enhance its overall effectiveness.

The Lebanese Army's arsenal is composed largely of ageing Western and Soviet-era weaponry, with only gradual modernisation achieved through selective procurement and international aid. The U.S. remains the army's principal benefactor, providing an annual assistance package of roughly 100 million USD. The European Union and several member states, particularly France, also contribute financial support and training. Yet this assistance is delivered under strict conditions. Donor countries impose firm limitations on the types of weapons supplied, consistently resisting the transfer of advanced air defence systems or long-range artillery. These restrictions are designed to preserve Israel's military superiority in the region and to prevent the possible use of such capabilities in Lebanon's internal conflicts. Paradoxically, the very international support that sustains the Lebanese Army is also what guarantees its enduring strategic inferiority—both to Hezbollah and to Israel. Any move toward direct confrontation would almost certainly trigger the suspension of this aid, leaving the army's operational capacity severely depleted within weeks. In this context, entering into open conflict would amount to institutional suicide, threatening the collapse of the military even before hostilities had fully begun.



The Lebanese Army is structured into three principal branches:

- **Land Forces:** Forming the backbone of the LAF, the land forces operate more than 4,500 armoured combat vehicles, most notably M113 armoured personnel carriers, which constitute a core component of brigade-level equipment. The arsenal also includes approximately 115 tanks—predominantly American-made M48 A5 and M60 A3 models—together with 12 self-propelled howitzers, 353 field artillery pieces, and 11 multiple rocket launchers.
- **Air Force:** With markedly limited operational capacity, the air force's primary responsibilities lie in ground support, reconnaissance, and counterterrorism missions. Its fleet comprises around 80 aircraft, including nine A-29 Super Tucano light attack planes and Cessna 208 Caravans armed with Hellfire missiles, alongside 69 helicopters. While adequate against soft targets, these assets are wholly insufficient to achieve or sustain air superiority against a technologically advanced adversary.
- **Naval Forces:** Tasked with securing Lebanon's territorial waters, the navy focuses on counter-smuggling operations, preventing illegal migration, and providing maritime support to Lebanese Army units.



The Lebanese Army and the American M60 tank



Hezbollah is widely recognised as a hybrid military force, possessing capabilities comparable to those of a medium-sized conventional army. This not only places it above the LAF in relative strength.

Estimates of Hezbollah's manpower vary considerably. U.S. intelligence assessments from 2022 suggest the group fields around 45,000 fighters, consisting of 20,000 full-time combatants and 25,000 reservists. By contrast, in a 2021 public address, the organisation's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, asserted that Hezbollah's military structure includes 100,000 trained fighters.

The group's annual military budget is estimated at approximately one billion USD, the bulk of which is provided by Iran. Beyond this, Hezbollah sustains itself through a wide-ranging financial network encompassing investment, global donations from Shia communities channelled via religious mechanisms such as khums (a one-fifth tax), and an array of commercial enterprises. Several of these activities have been targeted by international sanctions, linked to allegations of involvement in illicit operations.

Hezbollah's missile force constitutes the cornerstone of its military strategy. Before the 2023–2024 War, the group's arsenal was estimated at between 120,000 and 150,000 rockets and missiles, an inventory exceeding that of many sovereign states. Despite suffering significant losses during the recent conflict, current estimates suggest that Hezbollah retains tens of thousands of projectiles. This arsenal is highly diverse and includes the following categories:

- **Unguided Missiles:** Predominantly conventional Katyusha rockets.
- **Long-Range Missiles:** Iranian-manufactured systems such as the Fajr, Ra'ad, and Zelzal series, notable for their extended range and larger warheads.
- **Precision-Guided Missiles:** The most dangerous component of Hezbollah's arsenal, including systems such as the Fateh-110 and its advanced variants, capable of striking strategic targets with high precision.
- **Ballistic Missiles:** Systems such as the Qader-1, deployed to reach sensitive sites deep within Israeli territory.
- **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs):** A sophisticated fleet comprising reconnaissance, attack, and loitering (suicide) drones, which proved highly effective in the most recent war.



In addition to its formidable missile arsenal, Hezbollah commands a wide array of advanced and specialised military capabilities across several critical domains:

- **Anti-Armour Warfare:** Hezbollah's anti-tank units rank among its most elite forces. Equipped with advanced systems such as the Russian-made Kornet, these units have demonstrated considerable effectiveness against some of Israel's most modern tanks.
- **Air Defence:** The group operates a layered air defence network that ranges from man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS), such as the Igla and Strela, to mobile platforms capable of targeting Israeli aircraft, helicopters, and drones. This network imposes tangible constraints on the operational freedom of the Israeli Air Force.
- **Anti-Ship Missiles:** Since the 2006 Conflict, Hezbollah has shown its capacity to threaten naval assets. It is believed to field sophisticated anti-ship systems, including the Chinese C-802 and the Russian Yakhont missiles, enhancing its ability to project power into the maritime domain.



Hezbollah's Kornet missiles


Table (1) Comparative Military Capabilities: The Lebanese Army vs Hezbollah

Indicator	Lebanese Armed Forces	Hezbollah	Analytical Notes
Manpower	~60,000 active / ~30,000 reserve	45,000–100,000 fighters	Hezbollah's figures are imprecise but reflect significant mobilisation capacity. Its fighters are more experienced and battle-hardened.
Annual Budget	~ one billion USD	~ one billion USD	Most of the Lebanese Army's budget is consumed by operational costs, while Iran's in-kind support significantly boosts Hezbollah's purchasing power.
Land Forces	~200 tanks, ~4,500 armoured vehicles, ~450 artillery pieces	No conventional armoured forces in Lebanon	The Lebanese Army holds quantitative superiority in armour, but lacks air cover and faces serious threats from Hezbollah's advanced anti-tank weapons.



Indicator	Lebanese Armed Forces	Hezbollah	Analytical Notes
Missile Force	30 multiple rocket launchers	30,000+ rockets and missiles (post-2024 estimate)	Hezbollah holds overwhelming quantitative and qualitative superiority, including precision and ballistic missiles unmatched by any equivalent army capabilities.
Air Defence	Outdated and limited systems	Diverse network, including MANPADS and mobile platforms	Hezbollah has a limited but effective low-altitude deterrent, while the Lebanese Army's air defence capacity is virtually non-existent.
Anti-Armor Capabilities	TOW, Milan missiles	Thousands of advanced missiles (e.g. Kornet, Metis)	Hezbollah holds absolute qualitative superiority, rendering the Lebanese Army's armour highly vulnerable in any direct confrontation.



Indicator	Lebanese Armed Forces	Hezbollah	Analytical Notes
Air Force	nine light attack aircraft, 68 helicopters	No manned aircraft	The Lebanese Army possesses a limited close air support capability, which would be ineffective against a force with functioning air defences.
Unmanned Aerial Vehicles	Reconnaissance drones (e.g. Raven)	Diverse fleet (reconnaissance, attack, loitering)	Hezbollah enjoys a significant edge in this domain, which has become pivotal in contemporary warfare.
Naval Forces	Patrol boats	Anti-ship missiles (C-802, Yakhont)	The Lebanese Army can exert coastal control, whereas Hezbollah possesses the capacity to threaten large naval vessels.



The stark disparity between the Lebanese Army and Hezbollah extends far beyond differences in military hardware; it reflects a fundamental divergence in combat doctrine and accumulated field experience.

The Lebanese Army's mission is largely focused on counterterrorism and internal security. Its doctrine is anchored in the defence of national sovereignty and the protection of borders against external aggression, with an overarching emphasis on preserving national unity and transcending sectarian divides. The army has gained operational experience through key engagements such as the 2007 Battle of Nahr al-Bared—a gruelling urban confrontation with an isolated terrorist organisation, during which the LAF displayed notable tactical resilience and endurance under strong political backing. Further evidence of its evolving capacity emerged in the battles of Aarsal and Fajr al-Joroud against terrorist groups, where improved planning and operational effectiveness were reinforced by intelligence cooperation with international partners.

Yet these victories, earned against adversaries lacking both broad popular support and strategic depth, are limited in scope when compared with Hezbollah's combat record. The group has evolved into a regional military actor with layered strategic capabilities, underpinned by extensive battlefield experience that far surpasses that of the national army.

By contrast, Hezbollah's military doctrine is rooted in resistance to Israeli occupation and opposition to Western regional influence, underpinned by an ideological commitment to Iran's doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist). This alignment has imbued the group with a distinctly regional character. Hezbollah's battlefield experience has been shaped by protracted conflict, most notably through years of attritional warfare against Israeli forces and the July 2006 War, during which it demonstrated its capacity to absorb sustained pressure while inflicting strategic losses on Israel. These confrontations elevated Hezbollah's status to that of a regional deterrent force.



The group's intervention in the Syrian conflict marked a further transformation, shifting its posture from that of a defensive resistance movement to an offensive actor capable of operating beyond Lebanese territory. In Syria, Hezbollah acquired unique operational experience in urban warfare and in coordinating with both regular and irregular forces, enabling it to evolve into a competent regional expeditionary force. This evolution has been reinforced by advanced training for its elite units in camps inside Iran, where fighters have been equipped with cutting-edge tactics, modern weaponry, and electronic warfare capabilities. As a result, Hezbollah today holds a significant technical and tactical advantage over Lebanon's conventional armed forces.

Accordingly, a comparison between the Lebanese Army and Hezbollah exposes a substantial qualitative gap that makes any prospective confrontation between them inherently asymmetric. While the Lebanese Army's operational experience, though noteworthy, is largely confined to counterterrorism and domestic security campaigns against relatively limited non-state actors, Hezbollah has cultivated far broader military expertise. The group's record encompasses direct conflict with a state adversary such as Israel, the management of a complex regional war in Syria, and a continuing war of attrition with Israel. These varied combat theatres have provided Hezbollah with a degree of tactical adaptability and strategic depth that far surpasses that of the national army. Whereas the Lebanese Army has evolved primarily into a counterinsurgency force, Hezbollah has become a regional expeditionary actor, adept in advanced guerrilla warfare and combined operations. The result is a pronounced operational and strategic disparity that underscores the asymmetric nature of any potential confrontation between the two.

However, the decisive factor in assessing the likelihood of military confrontation between the two sides lies not solely in the balance of power, but in Lebanon's fragile political and sectarian order. The Lebanese Army is more than a military institution; it embodies national unity. Its organisational structure is built upon proportional representation of all sectarian communities, which grants it broad legitimacy and sustains the trust of much of the population. Yet this very structure imposes severe constraints on the army's freedom of manoeuvre. The memory of the Civil War, together with past episodes of sectarian fragmentation within the armed forces, remains deeply etched in the national consciousness. The military leadership is acutely aware that any decision risking clashes among soldiers within mixed-sect units could precipitate the disintegration of the institution itself. For this reason, the Lebanese Army maintains a posture of political neutrality and refrains from actions that might imperil Lebanon's delicate sectarian equilibrium. In practice, this often translates into reinterpreting or delaying the implementation of decisions that could threaten the army's internal cohesion.

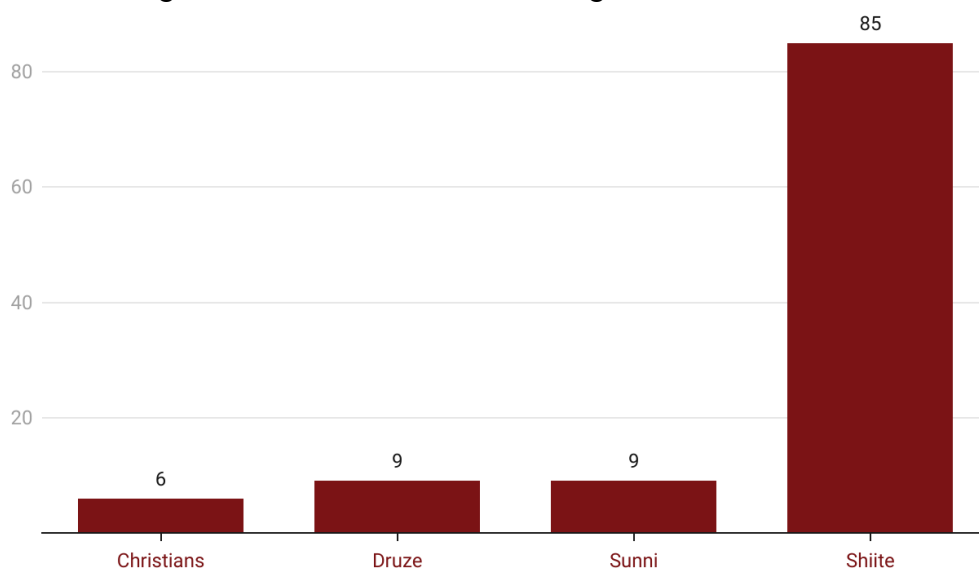


Militarily, any decision to act against Hezbollah is not taken autonomously by the Lebanese Army but remains contingent upon political consensus. The army operates under the authority of the Council of Ministers, itself riven by political and sectarian divisions. As such, external pressure to drive the LAF into direct confrontation with Hezbollah, without a prior consensus, risks fracturing the institution from within.

At the same time, Hezbollah cannot be viewed solely as an armed organisation. It has become a deeply embedded socio-political movement within Lebanon's Shia community and, more broadly, across sections of Lebanese society. Over decades, the group has constructed a "parallel state," providing services ranging from schools and hospitals to financial institutions such as the al-Qard al-Hassan Association. Its extensive social welfare networks serve a wide base of the population, cultivating a loyalty that extends beyond political allegiance to one of existential dependence.

Politically, Hezbollah has exercised significant influence since securing representation in parliament and government in 1992. This formal presence affords it internal legitimacy within Lebanon's political system and the capacity to shape—or obstruct—official decisions through democratic mechanisms. While its nationwide popularity has diminished in recent years due to Lebanon's economic collapse and the group's contentious regional role, Hezbollah continues to command strong backing within its Shia constituency. Recent opinion polls suggest that approximately 85% of Lebanese Shia still express confidence in the organisation, a figure that stands in stark contrast to the minimal support it enjoys among other sectarian groups.

Percentage Of Trust In Hezbollah Among Sects in Lebanon



• Source: Arab Barometer



Therefore, any military confrontation with Hezbollah would not be limited to combat with its fighters, but would constitute a clash with a deeply embedded segment of the Lebanese society, one that is socially and politically intertwined with the group. This reality necessitates more than security measures alone; it demands the creation of a credible alternative capable of cultivating public loyalty by providing services, upholding justice, and meeting citizens' needs—an undertaking in which the Lebanese state has repeatedly failed over past decades.

At the broader political level, Lebanon's governance is anchored in a system of "consociational democracy" or sectarian power-sharing. While this model helped bring the Civil War to an end, it has produced chronic paralysis in decision-making, particularly on matters touching sovereignty, such as the question of Hezbollah's weapons. In practice, each major political and sectarian bloc wields an effective veto over decisions that threaten its core interests. Consequently, achieving national consensus on disarming Hezbollah is virtually unattainable. Any attempt to proceed with such a decision would almost inevitably trigger the withdrawal of the Shia bloc from government, stripping it of legitimacy and transforming the move into a de facto declaration of civil war. This would plunge Lebanon once again into internal conflict and widespread instability.

Hezbollah's Tools for Confronting State Decisions

In response to attempts to restrict the possession of arms to state authority, Hezbollah deploys four interrelated and complementary instruments: political escalation, popular mobilisation, parliamentary manoeuvring, and field-level control. These tools are further reinforced by carefully calibrated tactics—ranging from intimidation and negotiation to deliberate security disruptions—all designed to obstruct and ultimately derail implementation efforts.

Political Escalation and the National Debate

Hezbollah employs deliberate political escalation and the orchestration of national debate as central mechanisms to block any measures directed at its arsenal. The group launches systematic campaigns of rejection, branding such decisions a "grave error" and insisting that unilateral action constitutes a breach of the internal accords and constitutional arrangements that secure its position. Its strategy extends beyond outright refusal. Hezbollah reframes the question of its weapons as a matter of national interest that demands a broad-based consensus. To this end, it calls for a "comprehensive national dialogue" aimed at formulating a "consensual, integrated defence strategy." By doing so, the group constructs a political and institutional narrative that shifts the discussion from disarmament to the broader realm of Lebanon's national security. This redefinition renders unilateral action politically untenable, allowing Hezbollah to justify non-compliance on the grounds that dialogue must precede any substantive decision.



Mobilising the Popular Base and the Threat of Civil War

Mobilising public support and activating its grassroots base constitute one of Hezbollah's most powerful levers of pressure, second only to its military strength. The group has the organisational capacity to orchestrate sustained protests, stage large-scale marches, and employ civil disobedience tactics that disrupt Lebanon's economic and social life. These measures are accompanied by explicit deterrent rhetoric that highlights the catastrophic consequences of imposing decisions by force. Hezbollah consistently warns of scenarios that could escalate into full-scale armed conflict—what it frames as civil war—a prospect firmly opposed by most Lebanese political factions and international actors, given its potentially devastating implications for both national stability and regional security. Through this strategy, Hezbollah reinforces its role as an indispensable political and social actor, one that cannot be marginalised without broad popular consent. Simultaneously, it cultivates a pervasive fear of chaos and internecine conflict, thereby raising the political and security costs of any military or coercive attempt to challenge its armed presence.

In response to the Lebanese government's decision to restrict arms exclusively to state institutions, Hezbollah mobilised its popular base and took to the streets in a concerted effort to obstruct implementation. The group coupled this mobilisation with stark warnings of potentially dire consequences, including the prospect of civil war. Hezbollah organised marches and demonstrations across its strongholds, particularly in southern Lebanon, while staging high-profile events such as mass motorcycle rallies. These displays served not only to heighten public tension but also to generate tangible momentum on the ground against the disarmament plan, reinforcing the message that any attempt to strip the group of its weapons would carry significant political and security risks.



Hezbollah's Secretary General, Naim Qassem, issued stark threats, warning of a "Karbala-like battle" should disarmament be enforced by force. He placed full responsibility on the government for any internal explosion or security breakdown, framing such an action as tantamount to surrendering Lebanon to the Israeli enemy and igniting widespread sectarian strife. These statements, coupled with street-level mobilisation, underscore Hezbollah's strategy of employing its popular base as a protective shield against the enforcement of state decisions. At the same time, the group escalates tensions and invokes security threats to rally its supporters in anticipation of potential confrontations, whether civil or security-related. Through such manoeuvres, Hezbollah seeks to engineer a condition of political and social paralysis that obstructs the government's ability to advance the disarmament agenda, particularly amid heightened regional instability and mounting international pressure. This dual strategy—parliamentary obstruction combined with popular mobilisation and implicit threats of violence—forms a comprehensive pressure mechanism from which Hezbollah derives enduring strength in the face of a Lebanese state devoid of effective alternatives.

Political Manoeuvring and Institutional Paralysis

Hezbollah relies extensively on political manoeuvring and institutional obstruction as primary instruments for safeguarding its influence and shaping Lebanon's political order. Central to this approach is its representation in both parliament and the Council of Ministers, which provides the group with the means to exploit constitutional mechanisms to paralyse state institutions.

Through persistent opposition to key decisions and the orchestration of ministerial walkouts, Hezbollah is able to deprive ministries of legitimacy or functionality, thereby undermining the state's capacity to enact critical measures—particularly those directed at constraining its unauthorised military power.

While traditional tools such as the "blocking third" veto have lost some of their effectiveness amid shifting political and regional dynamics, Hezbollah's ability to apply political pressure remains formidable. Its entrenched presence ensures that institutional decision-making remains constrained, with any initiative that challenges its core interests vulnerable to obstruction, delay, or outright failure. These dynamics are exemplified by Hezbollah's decisive role in obstructing the formation of successive Lebanese governments, particularly in the aftermath of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri's assassination in 2005.



On several occasions, cabinet formation was stalled for months as Hezbollah and its allies demanded veto power and insisted on retaining control over key ministries—most notably the Ministry of Finance. This portfolio affords the group substantial leverage over state administration, enabling it to impede government decisions at will.

Hezbollah has also employed its parliamentary and ministerial presence to block legislation designed to curb its military and political influence, consistently refusing to implement measures that require broad national consensus. The result has been near-constant institutional paralysis and the suspension of critical reforms, particularly those addressing the disarmament of armed groups. The group's obstructive tactics extended to the presidential succession process following Michel Aoun's departure from office. Together with its allies, Hezbollah leveraged parliamentary manoeuvring to derail the electoral process, rejecting candidates who did not align with its strategic orientation. This produced a presidential vacuum that lasted more than two years, paralysing state institutions, halting urgent reforms, and deepening Lebanon's already acute political and social crises.

In addition, Hezbollah leverages its political role to safeguard its military and social interests, framing the protection of the Shia community it represents as a central justification. This narrative complicates any meaningful attempt to curtail its arsenal or restrict its activities, as such efforts are cast as threats to national stability and potential triggers of sectarian strife. Through this lens, Hezbollah's trajectory in Lebanon demonstrates how it has systematically exploited political and institutional manoeuvring as a core strategic tool to consolidate dominance over the political landscape. The outcome is a Lebanese state chronically unable to assert full sovereignty, while Hezbollah ensures the continuity of its armed presence and entrenched influence across both the political system and the broader social fabric.

Managing Field Ambiguity and Backchannel Negotiations

Hezbollah pursues a strategy of balance, blending selective cooperation with the state in certain areas—such as south of the Litani River—to ease international pressure and project an image of compliance, while deliberately delaying implementation to preserve its armed presence and secure time to rebuild its military and defensive capabilities. Concurrently, the group deploys explicit security threats, warning that any attempt to enforce decisions by force would spark a “Karbala-style” battle—a strategic allusion to a decisive confrontation of resistance.



This narrative shifts responsibility for any potential security collapse onto the government, highlighting the risks of coercive enforcement and effectively making the state accountable for any ensuing breakdown.

In parallel, Hezbollah sustains secret backchannel negotiations with both official and unofficial state actors, seeking arrangements that enable it to maintain face while safeguarding its political and military role. Such negotiations often signal a tacit readiness to avert open confrontation, provided that an “honourable” settlement can be reached. This integrated strategy, straddling both the military and political spheres, equips Hezbollah with a spectrum of tools to manage pressure and reinforce its position within Lebanon’s fragile and complex political landscape.

Scenarios of Confrontation

The Lebanese government’s decision to assert exclusive state control over all weapons presents Hezbollah with critical choices, each bearing profound implications for Lebanon’s future.

Scenario One: Voluntary Disarmament and Political Transformation

Hezbollah has categorically dismissed the prospect of voluntary disarmament, characterising it as “political suicide” and a profound affront to national dignity. Its leadership maintains that the group’s arsenal remains Lebanon’s sole effective deterrent against Israeli aggression and broader regional threats. This position is firmly anchored in the historical legacy of the Taif Agreement, which—while bringing the Lebanese Civil War to a close—singled out Hezbollah as the only militia permitted to retain its arms, setting it apart from all other factions.

Subsequent UN Security Council Resolutions—namely 1559, 1680, and 1701—have consistently called for the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon. Yet these resolutions have remained largely unenforced, allowing Hezbollah to expand and consolidate its arsenal. From the perspective of Hezbollah’s leadership, the Lebanese government’s disarmament decision is perceived not as a sovereign initiative but as part of an externally driven agenda, orchestrated by the U.S. and Israel to advance their strategic objectives.

Despite Hezbollah’s categorical rejection, both internal and external pressures for its disarmament remain acute. The Lebanese government, with backing from the U.S. and the EU, has actively linked the issue to the provision of urgently needed reconstruction aid and the prospect of an Israeli withdrawal from disputed territories



Within Lebanon, Christian political parties have been especially outspoken, condemning Hezbollah's continued armament as "irrational and obsolete" and accusing the group of subordinating the country to Iran's regional agenda. They argue that Hezbollah's longstanding narrative of "deterrent weapons" has lost credibility, failing to convince either the Lebanese public or the international community.

Sunni and Druze leaders have likewise voiced strong opposition to Hezbollah's military apparatus, portraying it as both a source of sectarian division and a fundamental obstacle to the consolidation of national sovereignty.

Given Hezbollah's strategic calculus, its deep-rooted social entrenchment within the Shia community, and its conviction that its arsenal constitutes an indispensable deterrent against Israel, the prospect of voluntary disarmament appears exceedingly unlikely. The organisation regards its military wing as an inseparable element of its identity, a source of strength, and a guarantor of its capacity to protect its electoral base—functions it believes the Lebanese state is neither willing nor able to fulfil effectively.

Scenario Two: Direct Confrontation with the Lebanese Army

The Lebanese government's decision to assert exclusive state control over all weapons presents Hezbollah with critical choices, each bearing profound implications for Lebanon's future.

The prospect of a direct military confrontation between the Lebanese Army and Hezbollah carries grave risks and potentially catastrophic consequences for Lebanon. Historically, the Lebanese Army has avoided such a clash, largely because of the country's sectarian sensitivities and Hezbollah's clear military superiority.

While the army has proven its competence in counterterrorism operations against groups such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra—demonstrating a capacity for "21st-century manoeuvre warfare" through effective intelligence use and precision strikes—any engagement with Hezbollah would pose an entirely different order of challenge. Hezbollah represents a highly organised hybrid force: battle-hardened, deeply entrenched within civilian environments, and fortified by extensive combat experience from the Syrian conflict. This combination renders the prospect of direct confrontation an exceedingly perilous undertaking for Lebanon's national army and for the stability of the state itself.



Hezbollah's tactical strengths—including its vast arsenal of rockets, thousands of anti-tank missiles, extensive use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and a sophisticated network of attack tunnels and fortified positions—would present formidable challenges to the Lebanese Army in any asymmetric confrontation. Urban warfare would prove especially perilous. Hezbollah is deeply embedded within densely populated civilian areas, frequently operating from within residential and public infrastructure. Any attempt to dislodge the group would almost certainly lead to significant civilian casualties, widespread destruction of infrastructure, and the mass displacement of populations. Such an outcome would impose an intolerable humanitarian and economic burden on a country already debilitated by financial collapse, political paralysis, and social crisis.

Moreover, a forced confrontation would risk aggravating Lebanon's entrenched sectarian divides, with the potential to fracture even the Lebanese Army itself, despite its efforts to uphold a non-sectarian identity. Historical precedent during the Civil War demonstrates how the army splintered along sectarian lines—an outcome that would prove catastrophic for Lebanon's already fragile cohesion. Although the recent assassination of Hassan Nasrallah and the collapse of the Al-Assad regime could weaken Hezbollah, such developments might equally make the group more unpredictable or desperate, increasing the likelihood of miscalculation and provoking a more aggressive response. Any conflict of this magnitude would almost inevitably draw in regional and international actors, amplifying instability not only within Lebanon but across the broader Middle East.

The fragile balance between the Lebanese Army's national legitimacy and Hezbollah's military superiority is central to evaluating the feasibility of direct confrontation. The Lebanese Army's foremost strength lies in its legitimacy: it is widely perceived as a unified, non-sectarian institution that commands the confidence of most Lebanese citizens as well as international partners. Yet this moral authority is offset by its limited military capability. In terms of advanced weaponry and overall firepower, the army is broadly considered inferior to Hezbollah. This fundamental asymmetry means that, although the LAF possesses national and international legitimacy, any direct engagement with Hezbollah would be laden with political and operational risk. The army's capacity to sustain a prolonged, high-intensity conflict against a heavily armed, battle-hardened non-state actor embedded within civilian areas remains doubtful, constrained as it is by outdated equipment, chronic financial shortfalls, and dependence on external aid. A confrontation of this nature could erode the army's unifying role, fracture its internal cohesion, and weaken the very state institutions it is meant to defend—without any assurance of achieving a decisive military victory.



Scenario Three: Prolonged Stalemate and Gradual Negotiationsc

Given Lebanon's current political dynamics, the most plausible outcome is a prolonged stalemate accompanied by incremental, though arduous, negotiations over Hezbollah's gradual disarmament. While the group has publicly rejected the government's disarmament plan, it has thus far refrained from resorting to military force. This restraint may indicate either a strategic recalibration under new leadership or a weakening of Hezbollah's capabilities in the wake of recent clashes with Israel. These conditions create space for a phased disarmament framework, which Beirut is reportedly seeking to negotiate with Washington. Such an arrangement would be conditional upon Israel's withdrawal from key strategic positions in southern Lebanon, a cessation of Israeli airstrikes, and binding international guarantees of substantial reconstruction aid to stabilise Lebanon's collapsing economy and war-damaged infrastructure.

The Lebanese Army has already assumed a role in dismantling elements of Hezbollah's military infrastructure. Reports indicate that it has addressed 460 of the 670 violations documented by Israel and dismantled more than 90% of Hezbollah's installations in southern Lebanon, frequently acting on intelligence provided by Israel.

This reflects a degree of coordination and operational effectiveness, particularly south of the Litani River, where the Lebanese Army has established a presence at approximately 100 locations since November 2024. In parallel, UNIFIL—the United Nations peacekeeping mission—has uncovered “an extensive network of fortified tunnels” along with concealed weapons caches in the same region, which the LAF has been assigned to dismantle as part of its mandate.

International pressure and assistance serve as decisive levers in shaping this scenario. Lebanon's international partners—most notably the U.S. and the EU—have explicitly tied substantial military and financial aid to the consolidation of state authority and progress toward disarming non-state actors. Since 2006, the U.S. has invested more than three billion USD in the Lebanese Army, enabling it to function as a stabilising institution. France has pledged an additional USD 100 million, while the EU has announced a 12.5 million euros project aimed at supporting the army's recovery efforts and strengthening security in southern Lebanon. Such assistance is vital at a time when Lebanon's severe economic crisis has drastically eroded the army's budget and the purchasing power of its personnel, leaving external aid as the primary means of sustaining its operational capacity.



Hezbollah has demonstrated a limited degree of openness to discussions on a “national defence strategy,” suggesting a potential willingness to engage in negotiations while simultaneously maintaining its armed posture. Nonetheless, the group’s long-term resilience will depend heavily on its ability to sustain and adapt its financial networks and smuggling routes in the face of mounting international sanctions and state-level pressure. In this context, the role of UNIFIL and UN Security Council Resolution 1701 remains significant. The resolution mandates the cessation of hostilities, the strengthening of UNIFIL’s mandate, the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, and the creation of a buffer zone between the Blue Line and the Litani River, free of armed personnel other than the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL. Although UNIFIL has largely failed to enforce the disarmament of non-state actors, it continues to monitor the Blue Line and coordinate with both the Lebanese Army and the Israeli military to prevent escalation. Sustained international support for UNIFIL, alongside continued aid to the Lebanese Army, is widely regarded as essential to preserving stability and enabling the gradual extension of state authority.

This analysis underscores the profound gap between the Lebanese Army’s constrained capabilities—whether in terms of equipment, budget, or armament—and Hezbollah’s advanced military and technical assets, bolstered by extensive battlefield experience. This imbalance is further compounded by Hezbollah’s significant political and social influence, rooted both within the Shia community and across Lebanon’s broader governance system. While international support remains indispensable for the Lebanese Army’s survival, such assistance is heavily conditional. These restrictions limit the army’s ability to build sufficient capacity to confront Hezbollah and expose it to the risk of institutional collapse should an actual conflict erupt. Past engagements, including those during the 2023–2024 War, highlight the Lebanese Army’s capacity to dismantle segments of Hezbollah’s infrastructure in southern Lebanon. Yet these efforts produced only limited results, reflecting the absence of favourable political and security conditions for a full-scale confrontation—particularly in the face of Hezbollah’s expansive networks and deeply entrenched political and popular influence.



By contrast, the Lebanese Army retains superiority in its formal structure as a professional national force, capable of wide-scale territorial deployment and control. Its elite formations, such as the Rangers Regiment and the Airborne Regiment, are well-trained and regarded as highly competent within their operational domains. Hezbollah, however, holds overwhelming superiority in asymmetric capabilities. Its extensive firepower, capacity to inflict strategic damage, and proven operational effectiveness in complex, multi-dimensional combat environments set it apart. The group's military doctrine, organisational framework, and specialised training are deliberately tailored to confront technologically advanced adversaries such as the Israeli military. This orientation grants Hezbollah a clear advantage in irregular warfare scenarios and any prospective internal conflict, where its hybrid capabilities significantly outmatch those of the Lebanese Army.

Financially, any apparent parity between the Lebanese Army and Hezbollah in terms of annual budgets is misleading. The Lebanese Army bears the weight of substantial operational expenditures, including infrastructure maintenance, salaries, and essential services, leaving only a narrow margin for investment in qualitative armament and modernisation. Hezbollah, by contrast, benefits from direct Iranian support in the form of weapons, training, and advanced technologies that lie outside its formal financial accounts. This external backing enables the group to channel its own resources almost exclusively into enhancing its combat capabilities, giving it a decisive edge over the resource-strapped national army.

Given these structural disparities, any direct military confrontation between the Lebanese Army and Hezbollah would almost certainly precipitate a catastrophic scenario, risking renewed internal strife and a security collapse reminiscent of the Civil War era. Such turmoil could, in turn, furnish Israel with a pretext to expand its military control over southern Lebanon, potentially culminating in direct occupation under the justification of protecting its borders from Lebanon's instability. At the same time, Hezbollah retains an array of effective tools to obstruct the enforcement of any official disarmament decision—from political escalation and mass mobilisation to paralysing state institutions through its entrenched influence in parliament and government. This reality renders a direct military response virtually impossible without the foundation of a genuine national consensus and strong, resilient state institutions. A more pragmatic course lies in the pursuit of a consensus-based defensive strategy and a political settlement designed to curtail the influence of non-state arms gradually. Such an approach offers a more viable path forward than a confrontation whose outcome would, by all measures, favour the stronger and better-armed party.



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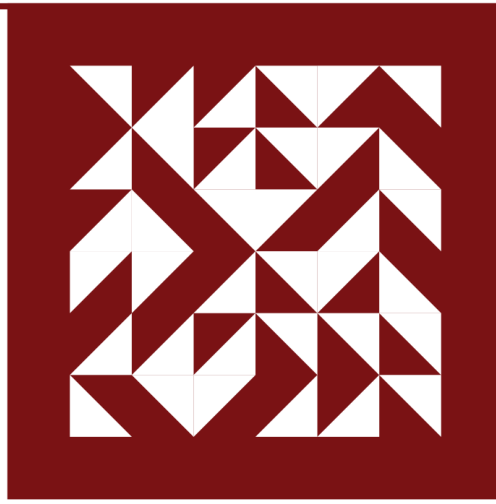
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