FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY 26.11.2025 | Verena El Amil

Will Hezbollah surrender their weapons?

Calls to disarm Hezbollah are mounting — but lasting peace is impossible without a Lebanese state that can reclaim real sovereignty over its own land

On 27 November 2024, a Lebanon–Israel ceasefire ended six weeks of hostilities — the most intense since 2006, marked by pager bomb attacks and the assassinations of Hezbollah leaders Hassan Nasrallah and Hashem Safieddine. But as the dust settled, it became apparent that Lebanon faced significant political challenges in maintaining stability.

The country was then in deep institutional paralysis, with the presidency vacant since October 2022 and political factions divided. Army Commander Joseph Aoun, Washington's preferred presidential candidate, faced Hezbollah's opposition, which viewed his rise as a Western bid to shift the internal balance of power.

Amid the deadlock, Speaker Nabih Berri emerged as the main intermediary in the ceasefire and disarmament talks. Though often blamed for institutional decay, he played a key role in ending the fighting and bringing Hezbollah to the table. In January, then, after a fragile compromise between reformists and remnants of the March 14 bloc, Nawaf Salam was appointed prime minister. His cabinet announced a phased disarmament plan coordinated with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and international partners. For the first time, a Shiite minister was appointed outside the Hezbollah–Amal alliance.

On 5 September, the cabinet finally approved the LAF's multi-phase plan to dismantle Hezbollah's arsenal and other non-state weapons, beginning south of the Litani River and later expanding nationwide. Although five Shiite ministers walked out before the vote, the decision passed, marking the first formal step toward implementing the ceasefire and initiating state-supervised disarmament.

In recent weeks, the fragility of Lebanon's post-war calm has become unmistakable. The Israeli strike that killed senior Hezbollah commander

Haytham Tabatabai in Beirut on 23 November shattered the illusion of containment, bringing the confrontation back to the capital's heart. Yet this strike was not merely tactical; it reflected a calculated strategy of entrapment, a deliberate attempt to provoke Hezbollah into retaliation, much as Israel did after the assassination of Fouad Shokor, hoping to drag Lebanon into a wider confrontation that could justify Gaza-style devastation. So far, Hezbollah's restrained response has avoided that trap, but this silence is becoming increasingly costly. Each non-response emboldens Israel to escalate further, turning targeted killings into routine operations carried out deep inside Lebanese territory and even within Beirut's suburbs, without deterrence or consequence.

The question that never dies

The question of Hezbollah's disarmament has defined Lebanon's political debate for more than two decades. Every shift in government, every conflict or negotiation, ultimately returns to the same unresolved issue: a political party that continues to possess a private army larger and more capable than the state's own forces.

Historically, opposition to Hezbollah has been framed as a chicken and egg dilemma. Some contend that the disarmament of Hezbollah must come first – nothing else can be achieved until its weapons are dealt with – while others view the arms issue as an external, regional matter and argue that Lebanon can work on other domestic issues in parallel. In reality, these two approaches are not mutually exclusive; they can be pursued simultaneously.

However, what the events of 2024–2025 revealed is that this question is no longer theoretical but central to the survival of the Lebanese state itself, situated between the threat of renewed war and the mounting pressure of international conditionality. The central question posed by the international community now reads: Will Hezbollah surrender its weapons, and if so, how and when?

Israeli forces still occupy five positions inside Lebanese territory and continue cross-border operations.

A close reading of the ceasefire agreement shows that it largely reaffirmed UN Resolution 1701, focusing on disarmament south of the Litani River, Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese territories, indirect negotiations through international mediation, and the establishment of a US and French-led monitoring mechanism to oversee implementation, alongside the return of displaced residents and reconstruction efforts. In practice, implementation has been

partial.

International pressure now goes beyond the original framework, demanding rapid nationwide disarmament and pushing for direct rather than indirect negotiations. The mechanism remains incomplete, reconstruction has yet to begin, and civilians have not returned to many villages. Israeli forces still occupy five positions inside Lebanese territory and continue cross-border operations. In one recent incident in Blida, Israeli soldiers entered the municipal building where a local employee was sleeping and killed him despite having no ties to Hezbollah. In another case, the army's Arabic language spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, published a video filmed from inside Lebanese territory, providing further evidence that Israeli units continue to operate beyond the ceasefire line.

Between the lines of the ceasefire deal

The ceasefire may have carried underlying purposes beyond ending hostilities. One possible intent was to shift accountability onto the Lebanese state, subtly encouraging internal confrontation while allowing external actors to attribute any renewed tension not only to Hezbollah but also to the whole Lebanese state.

It could also be seen as an attempt to redefine the rules of engagement. Israel's wartime narrative, claiming to target Hezbollah and not the Lebanese people, may have been intended to inflame sectarian sensitivities, though these remained contained, maybe thanks to a collective memory of the civil war's devastation.

From this perspective, Israel's broader strategy might aim to render the Lebanese state fully answerable for future escalation and to legitimise potential strikes on key state infrastructure under the notion of shared responsibility. Should conditions deteriorate again, with Hezbollah weakened, the South devastated, and the army under-equipped, such a scenario might no longer be unimaginable.

True sovereignty requires both control over territory and the monopoly of legitimate force, neither of which the state currently holds.

The Lebanese government is now expected to oversee Hezbollah's disarmament, a task assigned to an underfunded army whose soldiers earn barely fifty dollars a month. The military's survival depends largely on foreign assistance, particularly from the United States, which has recently relied on private donations to sustain its aid. One such anonymous transfer of $130 million has already sparked questions about its

origin and whether it could carry political implications.

These demands persist even as Israel continues to violate the ceasefire, occupying positions in the South and striking villages and infrastructure. The army remains short of resources and cannot retain the level of weaponry Hezbollah possesses. As one US envoy remarked, 'We're not arming them to fight Israel, but their own people, Hezbollah.'

This situation exposes the limits of Lebanese sovereignty. True sovereignty requires both control over territory and the monopoly of legitimate force, neither of which the state currently holds. Israeli forces still occupy parts of Lebanese land, while internal power remains divided, leaving the state's authority fragmented and incomplete.

Potential scenarios

Several potential scenarios can be envisioned today.

The first is a renewed escalation, another round of aggression that could prove even more costly than the previous war. This time, conditions appear more favourable to Israel. The post-war destruction has already exposed much of the southern terrain, making any future advance easier and less costly. Under such circumstances, Israel might achieve on the ground what it could not before, potentially maintaining a longer presence until disarmament is enforced or even until a peace and normalisation framework is reached. Or perpetual long-term targeted attacks, low intensity conflict, preserving this status quo, which is unlikely.

A second scenario is political, driven by macro-level negotiations between the United States and Iran, which have recently resumed. If these talks lead to a broader regional understanding, the disarmament process could unfold through a negotiated settlement and reciprocal guarantees rather than confrontation.

A third most righteous path would focus on empowering the Lebanese state itself, not through coercion but through substantial international support that enables it to lead social recovery and reconstruction. By channelling resources through state institutions to rebuild and serve the communities most affected by the war, the government could be fortifying its legitimacy there, reclaiming its social role, and re-establishing the state's monopoly over armed force.

This approach would not only help achieve the swift implementation of disarmament and the consolidation of the state's monopoly over armed force, but also weaken the political instrumentalisation of the ideological and theological foundations of victimhood rooted in Shiite beliefs surrounding the martyrdom of Hassan and Hussein of Karbala. Hezbollah has long drawn on this narrative, invoking the state's historical absence from the South and the region's social marginalisation before liberation to justify its duality with the state and its claim to a broader regional role in defending Palestine and standing with the oppressed, the marginalised and the dispossessed. (It is worth noting that a potential settlement in Gaza and a final determination of the Palestinian question would also remove much of this regional *raison d'être*). Strengthening the state's presence and legitimacy would prevent the re-emergence of this discourse in the next decade and instead foster national cohesion and solidarity, a shared sense of victory and the emergence of a truly national rather than sectarian collective memory.

True sovereignty and monopoly of arms will emerge only when the state reclaims both its authority and its purpose, not by renouncing confrontation, but by transforming it into a project of national reconstruction, legitimacy and collective belonging. This is where all support, both international and domestic, should be directed.



Verena El Amil
Beirut

Verena El Amil is a lawyer at the Beirut Bar Association and a lecturer at Saint Joseph University of Beirut. She also works for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Lebanon. In addition, she is actively involved in promoting women's rights, secularism and social equality.