

Opinion – Reconstituting the Lebanese Security Forces Post-Ceasefire

Written by Julian McBride

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JULIAN MCBRIDE, MAY 12 2025

The Third Israel-Lebanon War is currently in a ceasefire phase that can turn into a permanent one with major regional implications. Not only must Hezbollah withdraw away from the Israeli border above the Litani River, but the paramilitary organization must also fully disarm with the Lebanese army taking full security of Lebanon. Lebanon's Security Forces (LSF) have the major task of implementing the ceasefire and capitulation, maintaining law and order, and keeping sectarian tensions at a minimum in hopes of a new unity government emerging. With minimal experience and a history of corruption and negligence, the LSF has a long road ahead and must reconstitute itself into a professional force for Lebanon.

Against the backdrop of the brutal October 7th terrorist attacks by the Hamas militants in Gaza, Hezbollah, an Iranian-proxy group in Southern Lebanon, supplemented the Gazan organization by firing rockets and redeploying Israeli assets to the North. The goal of Hezbollah's intervention was to relieve pressure off Gaza without drawing into a full-scale war. Still, tactics changed due to the limited propaganda victory the Shia paramilitary initially gained against Israel. For the first several months of 2024, despite significant losses, Hezbollah was able to displace 90,000 Israeli citizens from the North, which caused a degree of political turmoil in Tel Aviv. Months of indirect negotiations via the United States and France failed, and losing patience with the lack of settlement, Israel went on the offensive.

Conducting a shock and awe campaign, Israeli intelligence incapacitated thousands of Hezbollah fighters by simultaneously exploding various communications of the group. Next came major assassinations of senior leaders, including the longtime Secretary-General that built Hezbollah to regional heights, Hassan Nasrallah. After the shock and awe and numerous airstrikes, Israel conducted a ground campaign in an attempt to dismantle Hezbollah infrastructure in Southern Lebanon and create a buffer zone. Lebanon's battered economy could ill afford another war, and the internal displacement and plethora of losses led Hezbollah and the Lebanese government to negotiate a ceasefire via the US government.

Documents in the ceasefire not only call for United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 to take place, which states Hezbollah must withdraw beyond the Litani River—but it also calls for the disarmament of all armed groups that are not part of the Lebanese Security Forces—the Iranian affiliated paramilitaries included. The Lebanese army will not just be stationed alongside the border with Israel, the LSF will also help monitor all factions in Lebanon and have the ability to interdict possible weapons shipments from the Syrian border, Beirut International Airport, and remnants of the port.

According to the Western-brokered ceasefire, the Lebanese army will be first and foremost in charge of disarming non-state militias, preventing their remilitarization, and maintaining law and order across Lebanon. The army will be backed by the UN-Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United States, France, and eventually Israel itself when further negotiations are made on a permanent end of the conflict between both Levantine countries.

Though officially having diplomatic backing from the United States, France, and the United Nations to take charge of Lebanon's security and to mitigate another Hezbollah rise, the Lebanese Security Forces face major challenges between corruption, sectarianism, motivation, and force capabilities. The Lebanese Security Forces are among the

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less-equipped and capable militaries in the Middle East. Still feeling the scars of the civil war, the army and directorate never truly recovered into a professional fighting force.

Sectarian tensions, resulting from internal conflicts in the 1950s and 1970s, fractured command and control in the army. Even during the Syrian occupation, the LSF could not grow to true strength, as the Assad regime wanted Lebanon to be under a state of vassalage to Syria. Lebanon's Security Forces also face economic, recruitment, and retention challenges. Without a stable economy in Beirut, recruiting new potential co-signers and retaining forces who want a career path with guaranteed benefits will be harder.

For the LSF to solidify its hold as the main peacemaker and sole armed force in Lebanon, it must first take steps to reconstruct the army, police, and intelligentsia. First, the Lebanese Security Forces should prioritize mending sectarian tensions and proving itself as a force for the people, not just the government. Integrating disenfranchised young Shiite men who are displeased with Hezbollah's actions over the past year could help deny the militant group new recruits and mend fences in the country. The Lebanese Security Forces should also focus on corruption in the country, which has become rife with embezzlement and numerous foreign influences. The LSF must ensure it can be military for the people first to build trust nationwide. Growing partnerships with UNIFIL, the United States, and France could give an opportunity for the LSF officer corps to gain more experience and learn strategic operations on how to interdict weapons and drug trafficking across the border—especially as Lebanon suffered from Hezbollah's and Assad's captagon trade.

Lebanon's military has been tasked with being the first line of contact, maintaining peace, and mitigating non-state actors from rearming to pre-war heights. However, alongside current internal problems, the LSF also faces one major key hurdle—a lack of strength to confront Hezbollah. During decades of stagnation and internal strife, Hezbollah rapidly became not only the strongest fighting force in Lebanon but the world's strongest paramilitary organization. Amassing tens of thousands of fighters and having combat experience from numerous Middle Eastern theaters, Hezbollah may still be stronger than the army despite a plethora of losses.

Although at a significant disadvantage, the LSF will need to grow partnerships with UNIFIL and the ceasefire brokers of America and France and continue strong coordination with not just the UN but also Israel itself. Though not having a peace deal or normalized relations, indirect negotiations and communications between Israel and Lebanon will be imperative to mitigate a future war. A back-channel hotline via the US and UN could help coordinate the interdiction of weapons from non-state actors that could be rearmed.

A joint regional intelligence network for the Lebanese army with the United Nations, France, and America would help find key weapons storage facilities, potential cross-border interdictions, and coordination that would help mitigate Israeli military action. The LSF will have to be assertive but supportive of the people in Lebanon to gain trust and pull influence away from Hezbollah. Lebanon's security apparatus will not only be tasked with disarming all non-state actors, such as Hezbollah, but maintaining security and mitigating sectarian tensions that have plagued the country for decades. Though it needed much effort to reconstitute its structure, with internal and external help, the Lebanese Security Forces can be the regional force for stability that Lebanon has been missing since the 1960s.

About the author:

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