

U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon: Obstacles to Dismantling Hezbollah's Grip on Power
Seizing Lebanon's Narrow Window of Opportunity Requires Expanded U.S. Engagement

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Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on this important topic. Lebanon today presents a historic and time-limited opportunity for U.S. and regional engagement. Multiple shifts have converged that should energize an expanded U.S. policy.

First, Lebanese Hezbollah's profound military setbacks offer a narrow window to reorient the country. Hezbollah's capabilities, weapons arsenal, and ability to threaten Israel are significantly degraded since the Hamas terrorist attack of October 7, 2023, and Hezbollah's decision to drag Lebanon into war by opening a second front against Israel. Moreover, the other means by which the terrorist group undermined Lebanon's sovereignty and stability are at risk, including its political stranglehold on the Lebanese government. The November 2024 ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah confirmed this state of affairs: the agreement's terms are favorable to Israel, with a separate side letter that allows Israel to respond to immediate threats. Since the ceasefire came into effect, Hezbollah has repeatedly challenged it. Targeted Israeli strikes against Hezbollah operators and reconstituting efforts continue, underscoring that the group will continue to seek ways to rebuild. Although Hezbollah is under significant pressure, the United States should do more to make clear that this Iran-backed terrorist group's continued unwillingness to give up its arms is what has been holding Lebanon back from stabilization and recovery.

Second, the Iranian regime is unprecedentedly weak at home and abroad, and the regional ecosystem in which Iran-backed terrorist groups thrived is changed. Tehran is currently mired in its own brutal repression against Iranian citizens at home while its traditional means of projecting influence across the region are compromised. Iran's strategy to cultivate nonstate groups like Hezbollah and expand its missile arsenal to threaten the region failed. Sanctions against Iran's support for terrorism are depriving Hezbollah of cash in Lebanon. Tehran also lost its partnership in Syria with the December 2024 ouster of Bashar al-Assad, depriving the regime of a state partner in funneling cash, weapons, and advisors to Hezbollah in Lebanon. The ecosystem of strategic and operational support around Hezbollah is fundamentally changed, but other illicit networks and relationships persist. Without more effort to capitalize on their historic weakness, illicit actors will find workarounds. It is now possible for the United States and its partners to imagine a Middle East with new leaders who are focused on responsiveness and accountability to their own people and free of Iran's menace.

Third, new leaders in Beirut are empowered after more than a decade of political paralysis. Under the leadership of President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, the government formed in early 2025 charged the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with bringing all weapons south of the Litani River under state control by the end of last year. Although this mandate was not completely achieved, important steps should be acknowledged, and the trajectory is promising. Beirut is also taking early economic reform measures, including banking sector restructuring—important initial steps that require sustained follow-through. The new government is sincere regarding relations with Israel, recently appointing a senior Lebanese civilian to join the ceasefire military mechanism with a mandate to expand dialogue with Israel on security arrangements and beyond. These developments constitute a narrow window for Lebanon to claim state authority and advance long-overdue reforms.

However, current U.S. attention and investment are not aligned with this historic opportunity. U.S. policy is largely focused on Hezbollah and its disarmament. To keep focus on this objective, the Trump administration is maintaining pressure and attention through the military mechanism that coordinates the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, and supporting the LAF with non-advanced equipment. These critical elements of U.S. policy should continue, but on their own they form only a partial strategy. To consolidate the gains from Hezbollah’s weakness, the United States must broaden its engagement beyond security. A more developed U.S. policy approach should proactively encourage continued reform, articulate the conditions under which it would provide non-security assistance to the long-suffering Lebanese people across different communities, and engage other governments inclined to meddle in Lebanon’s messy politics ahead of the upcoming parliamentary election. It is also important to channel complementary efforts by regional leaders, Europeans, and others into a comprehensive strategy that lends additional credibility to the current government. In short, more investment and attention from Washington are needed in order to meet the opportunity of the moment.

Security Assistance

A key element of U.S. policy in Lebanon has been training, equipping, and supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces as the most credible national institution with broad public support for the past twenty years. Over the course of the partnership, the United States has provided roughly [\\$3 billion in Foreign Military Financing](#) and additional assistance to bolster the LAF’s capabilities. This policy has long been contentious, with skeptics questioning whether the LAF could or would confront Hezbollah and seize its illegal weapons. Nevertheless, recent progress merits acknowledgement.

The LAF has taken important steps, asserting authority over [Beirut’s airport](#), removing weapons from [Palestinian refugee camps](#), increasing [deployed forces](#) in southern Lebanon, and conducting searches of some [private homes](#). The LAF’s announcement that it has achieved “[operational control](#)” over Lebanese territory south of the Litani River is an important milestone, but it does not mean every private home and business has been cleared of Hezbollah assets. More work is needed, and the LAF should be encouraged to move quickly north of the Litani while maintaining operational control in the south and completing the clearing out of Hezbollah

fighters and weapons. This work must move faster: reports indicate that Hezbollah is moving quickly to rebuild and increasing its indigenous production of weapons north of the Litani.

If the LAF is to consolidate and expand these gains, targeted support is essential while holding the LAF accountable for effective operations. The LAF will need more vehicles, continued training, and sustainment to patrol and project presence. Recent U.S. announcements about transferring key equipment are important. The Trump administration approved four military support packages last year, including a presidential drawdown of [\\$14.2 million in September](#) and a [\\$240 million package in October](#). Sustained funding will be required to increase force size so the LAF can hold southern gains while extending operations northward. Salary support programs (including [U.S.-backed efforts begun in 2022](#)) remain critical to morale and retention. Finally, the LAF must be empowered and resourced to enter private businesses and homes where Hezbollah stores weapons and conceals activities if Lebanon is to reunify the monopoly of force under the state.

U.S. officials should seize two near-term opportunities to signal focus on completing Hezbollah's disarmament while supporting the LAF: the French-hosted conference in early March, and the LAF commander's visit to Washington [this week](#). The objective should be to make clear that U.S. support comes with expectations for performance and transparency: the United States has invested in the LAF for two decades in preparation for this moment, and the LAF needs to live up to that investment. Beirut's civilian leaders and LAF commanders should understand that continued support will be tied to the effectiveness of the disarmament process. These expectations must go beyond numbers of houses cleared and announcements of Hezbollah weapons decommissioned—Beirut must also transparently explain what it is doing with the seized weapons and the actions it is taking to shut down the illicit rearming process if it is to earn the confidence of the international community.

Beyond Security Assistance

While Trump administration officials have warned about the negative consequences of postponing Lebanon's May election, there is little indication of U.S. focus on supporting a free, fair, and credible vote that reflects the will of Lebanese voters, including those in the diaspora. The worst-case outcome would be a parliamentary makeup that mirrors the pre-October 7 one, leaving Hezbollah-affiliated politicians with influence. In the absence of visible U.S. leadership, regional actors—Qatar, Turkey, and others—are stepping into the political void, increasing external meddling to favor politicians beholden to outside priorities rather than focused on the needs of Lebanese citizens. The United States should make clear it will be difficult to work productively with a government that does not commit to meaningful economic reform, tackle corruption, and respond to the needs of all Lebanese. Importantly, any new parliament must empower and back the mandate of Lebanon's president and prime minister to bring all weapons under state control.

U.S. policy must also articulate a reconstruction and assistance strategy—especially for southern Lebanon—tied to disarmament incentives. The [World Bank 2025 Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment \(RDNA\)](#) estimates that postwar reconstruction and recovery in Lebanon will cost approximately \$11 billion. Many in Lebanon's Shia community may [choose not to rely on](#)

[Hezbollah](#) as their defender within the country, but acute humanitarian and rebuilding needs risk driving them back to the group if Beirut cannot deliver. Washington should pair concrete steps on Hezbollah's disarmament with support for reconstruction, quick-impact projects, and longer-term livelihood programs to ensure an inclusive post-Hezbollah future. This approach should build on multilateral efforts—including the World Bank's [recent loan to Lebanon's southern council](#)—and coordinate donor financing to make disarmament politically and materially sustainable.

Assistance, as well as advocacy with international financial institutions and other donors, should be part of a U.S. conditional package to Lebanon. Historically, the United States has provided Lebanon with billions of dollars in economic and humanitarian assistance, supporting governance, development, refugee relief, and emergency response after crises such as the 2020 Beirut port explosion. The Trump administration's suspension of most U.S. foreign assistance and termination of some programs impacted all U.S.-funded non-security activities in Lebanon. Restoring and refocusing that assistance can reinforce U.S. focus on supporting both reform and reconstruction.

Without something tangible on the table, the United States is ceding much of its influence to others and risks re-empowering ministries and local government entities that are still under Hezbollah's influence. Consider the Qatari government's recent announcement of \$480 million to [rebuild three communities in southern Lebanon](#), and then another \$400 million for Lebanon's electricity sector. Absent any performance benchmarks or expectations for continued Hezbollah disarmament, this generous assistance does not reinforce U.S. priorities for Lebanon. The United States should work with the international community—and donors like Turkey and Qatar—to ensure that funding does not benefit Hezbollah-linked entities.

There are many steps the Trump administration can take to seize this narrow window in Lebanon. First, it should expand the U.S. policy team in Lebanon beyond Ambassador Michel Issa. Employing additional diplomatic and technical experts will sustain engagement across security, governance, and reconstruction portfolios. A larger team would improve coordination with partners, better monitor on-the-ground progress, and signal sustained U.S. attention.

Second, President Trump should offer President Aoun a White House visit at the appropriate time this year to acknowledge progress and encourage further reforms, preferably before the May parliamentary election. A carefully timed visit would publicly reward concrete steps while reinforcing U.S. expectations for continued action and transparency on disarmament, anti-corruption, and inclusive governance.

Third, to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to Lebanon beyond Hezbollah's disarmament, the administration could publicly articulate the requirements for expanding U.S. support for Lebanon's recovery and present a plan for assistance beyond the security sector. Specifically, phased economic and reconstruction aid should be conditioned on defining a timeline for implementation of the remaining phases of the ceasefire agreement with Israel, affirming expectations for a transparent, credible election cycle, and seating a government like the current one—that is, technocratic, not shackled by persistent corruption, and committed to prioritizing the needs of the Lebanese people.

Finally, the United States must continue its critical role in facilitating direct dialogue between Lebanon and Israel toward eventual normalization. U.S. certification of Lebanese and Israeli confidence-building measures is critical. For its part, Beirut must implement all phases of the ceasefire and continue demonstrating commitment to Hezbollah's disarmament. Israel must be prepared to do its part, including withdrawing from its outposts in Lebanon after Hezbollah's complete disarmament is validated by a credible third party. Security agreements to end hostilities, demarcate remaining border areas, and related measures would be a watershed for Lebanon, Israel, and the region.