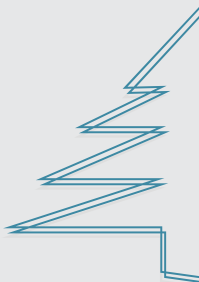


Assessment report

March 8, 2026

Lebanon Between Israeli Aggression and the State's Monopoly on Arms

Implications of the
Resolution to Ban
Hezbollah's Military
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Hezbollah's launch of a rocket strike and a wave of drones from southern Lebanon, against the "Mishmar HaCarmel" site, south of Haifa, at dawn on March 2, 2026, effectively plunged Lebanon into the regional conflict erupted two days prior. Operating under the banner of "avenging the blood of Imam Khamenei and defending Lebanon," the strikes followed the February 28 commencement of an Israeli American military campaign against Iran. The opening wave of that campaign had resulted in the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, along with several high-ranking of Iranian commanders and officials, and involved extensive strikes on military, security, and command centers across the country. In turn, Tehran's retaliation targeted not only Israel but also included large-scale strikes on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as well as Turkey and Cyprus.

Less than twenty-four hours after the Islamic Republic of Iran confirmed the Supreme Leader's assassination, Hezbollah launched what it termed a "warning" operation, that ultimately had little discernible military impact on the Israeli side. In response, Israel intensified its airstrikes on alleged Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon, before broadening its offensive to include the southern suburbs of Beirut and numerous other regions across the country. These strikes, coupled with evacuation orders for the southern suburbs and dozens of villages and towns in southern Lebanon, alongside an Israeli ground incursion, have placed Lebanon on a path of rapid escalation. This shift has fueled intense domestic speculation regarding Hezbollah's motives, particularly as the operation's seemingly limited impact stands in stark contrast to its heavy toll. This escalation unfolded despite assurances leaked days earlier from sources close to Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, a Hezbollah ally, to local and international stakeholders that Hezbollah would not initiate actions that might embroil Lebanon in a regional war on Iran's behalf.

The escalation triggered a large-scale displacement crisis, similar to that of September 2024, when more than a million people were forced to flee following a major Israeli offensive that targeted southern Lebanon, the southern suburbs of Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, and other parts of the country. That offensive lasted for sixty-six days, following Hezbollah's involvement in what it described as "support for Gaza" after the events of October 7. The war ended only through an understanding reached between Israel and Lebanon, under the auspices of the United States and France. The interpretation of this agreement's provisions, however, remained ambiguous. While Hezbollah committed to dismantling its military installations and infrastructure in the border area south of the Litani River, it refused to withdraw its weapons from areas north of the Litani or to surrender them. Israel, for its part, refused to withdraw from the Lebanese border territories it had occupied and declined to halt its military operations and air raids prior to Hezbollah's complete disarmament. Israeli attacks did not cease after the beginning of 2025, only weeks after the ceasefire that ended the sixty-six-day war. United Nations peacekeeping forces operating in southern Lebanon recorded more than 7,500 Israeli airspace violations and 2,500 ground violations during 2025. These operations also resulted in the extensive destruction of approximately fifty-five border towns and villages, preventing their residents from returning to their homes. According to data from Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health, the attacks during that year, caused 330 deaths and 945 injuries. Consequently, over the fifteen months that followed the November 2024 agreement, Hezbollah refrained from surrendering its weapons, but likewise avoided responding to Israeli attacks. Instead, it focused on rebuilding its capabilities while withdrawing from areas south of the Litani River, in accordance with its interpretation of the agreement. Meanwhile, the Lebanese government proved unable to halt these attacks either through diplomatic channels or through the ceasefire monitoring mechanism (the Mechanism Committee).

Hezbollah ultimately broke its military silence with the dawn operation on March 2nd. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun quickly described the move as an "irresponsible" act that risked dragging Lebanon into the broader regional conflict. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam adopted a similar stance, pledging to "hold those responsible accountable and protect the Lebanese people," while calling for an emergency cabinet meeting.

On the morning of March 2nd, hours after a significant military escalation, the Lebanese Cabinet convened under the chairmanship of President Joseph Aoun. The session was attended by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam and the Council of Ministers, including Hezbollah representatives who had joined the incumbent government after its formation over a year ago. The Cabinet issued a resolution emphasizing Lebanon's rejection of any military operations launched from its territory. Crucially, it reaffirmed that the "decision of war and peace" remains the exclusive prerogatives of the Lebanese state institutions; further mandating an immediate cessation of all Hezbollah's security and military activities.

The Resolution

Key Provisions of the Resolution:

First: The government resolution affirmed the Lebanese state's rejection of any military or security activity originating from Lebanese territory outside the purview of legitimate state institutions. It underscored that the decision of war and peace rests solely with the state. Accordingly, the resolution called for the immediate ban of Hezbollah's military and security activities, stipulating the surrender of its arsenal to the state. It further moved to confine the party's role to political sphere within constitutional and legal frameworks, thereby asserting the state's monopoly over arms and bolstering its sovereignty over the entirety of its territory. The decision further tasked the military and security apparatuses with taking immediate measures to preempt any military operations from Lebanese territory, including the launching of rockets or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and mandated the arrest of violators in accordance with applicable laws.

Second: The resolution instructed the Lebanese Army Command to move immediately and decisively to implement the plan previously submitted to the Cabinet. This specifically pertains to the component related to the "confinement of arms" in the region north of the Litani River, utilizing the necessary means to ensure practical enforcement.

Regarding implementation, Lebanese Justice Minister Adel Nassar announced that any individual apprehended in possession of unlicensed weaponry would be detained and referred to the Military Court, with the permanent confiscation of the arms, in coordination with the Public Prosecution. Simultaneously, Lebanese Army checkpoints, most notably the Al-Awali River crossing, have intensified vehicle inspections. These measures have thus far resulted in the detention of twenty-six Lebanese nationals across regions on charges of possessing unauthorized weapons and ammunition.

Hezbollah's Position

Hezbollah's opposition to the resolution, manifested firsts within the cabinet itself, where the party's two ministers refused to endorse it, although they were unable to block its adoption or initiate a withdrawal from the government. This stance was subsequently articulated politically, by MP Mohammad Raad, head of the Loyalty to the Resistance bloc (Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc). Raad denounced the government's move, characterizing it as a series of "swaggering decisions" directed against those Lebanese who resist the occupation. He argued that while the public anticipated a decree "prohibiting aggression," they were instead presented with one "prohibiting the resistance to aggression." He further asserted that Hezbollah's position reflects a rejection of the "path of subservience," and an objection to any attempt to persuade the Lebanese public that "reconciliation with the enemy and acquiescence to its dictate" is the sole guarantor of security and peace.

Following this initial position, Hezbollah Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem made his first public appearance since the escalation began. In a televised address on March 4, 2026, he reinforced the party's position with more assertive and explicit terms. He accused the Lebanese government of targeting the resistance and acquiescing to Israeli demands rather than confronting the "Israeli-American aggression," questioning the government's silence on the "large-scale offensive." Qassem underscored that "as long as the occupation persists, the resistance and its arsenal remain a legitimate right," adding that "the status of the resistance is not a subject for debate with anyone". He described the party's operations as a "response to aggression" and an "existential defense" that would continue "until its objectives are achieved". Notably, he emphasized that the current fighting in Lebanon, is not linked to any external front, but aims specifically to halt Israeli aggression and secure a withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territories.

This rejection transcended rhetoric and was translated into a series of military operations for which Hezbollah claimed responsibility in official communiqués issued by the "Islamic Resistance". The intensity of these operations escalated daily, with the party framing its objectives as a response to "criminal Israeli aggression" targeting dozens of Lebanese cities and towns, a deliberate attempt to distance these actions from direct regional entanglements. However, this narrative appeared to contradict the initial statement which has categorized the strikes as "retaliation" for the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Amid this escalation, Israeli media outlets broadcast claims of "joint" missile launches from Lebanon and Tehran, further blurring the lines between the two arenas, despite Hezbollah's official discourse. Furthermore, the party's reported targeting of "infiltrating" Israeli tanks into Lebanese territory, suggests a functional military presence south of the Litani River, contradicting the Lebanese Army's repeated assurances that the area remains free of any armed partisan presence.

The Amal Movement's Position

In a significant shift, the position of the Speaker of Parliament and head of the Amal Movement, Nabih Berri, a strategic and political ally of Hezbollah since the early 1990s, did not align with the party's rejection of the Cabinet decision. This divergence became evident when the two ministers affiliated with the Amal Movement refrained from objecting to the resolution, unlike their Hezbollah's counterparts. To date, however, Berri has avoided issuing an explicit public stance on these developments, responding to local media inquiries with a succinct: "No comment". The stance of Amal ministers carries additional significance in light of pre-war media reports, suggesting that Berri had assured international actors that Hezbollah would not initiate a war in support for Iran in any future conflict, an assurance undermined by the party's subsequent actions.

While several leaks attributed to Berri, suggested he might publicly endorse the cabinet's decision, no such statement materialized. Instead, his media office issued a brief communiqué emphasizing that his official positions are issued exclusively through his office. Consequently, while a clear divergence between Berri and Hezbollah regarding the cabinet's resolution is evident, the lack of a public rupture suggests the alliance has not formally unraveled, although Berri's future role in the implementation of the resolution remains uncertain.

Opposition to Hezbollah

Hezbollah's domestic opponents welcomed the government's resolution with ministers from the Lebanese Forces party in the cabinet advocating for the designation of Hezbollah as an "outlawed organization." Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea described the resolution as a significant step toward "establishing a functional state," asserting that the mandate for firm enforcement now rests with military, security, and judicial

apparatuses. Geagea further urged popular mobilization in support of the government in order to expedite the restoration of state authority.

The Kataeb Party adopted a similar position, describing the government's move as "historic" and emphasizing the necessity of a practical implementation phase. In this context, the party called for a comprehensive review of diplomatic ties with Iran, ultimately advocating the severance of those relations and the expulsion of the Iranian diplomatic mission. This position was subsequently reflected in a government decree imposing visa requirements on Iranian nationals entering Lebanon. Furthermore, the Kataeb Party called for the closure of illicit economic and financial institutions that it described as organizational or financial extensions for non-state actors, and for placing them fully under the authority of the law.

This stance was broadly shared by Hezbollah's other opponents, both individuals and political blocs. Support also extended to actors that had not been previously in outright confrontation with the party, such as the Progressive Socialist Party. Its historical leader, Walid Jumblatt, described the government's resolution as "excellent," while the Free Patriotic Movement endorsed the decision, declaring its support for the Lebanese Army and its commander in implementing it, provided the civil peace is preserved. Consequently, the cabinet's resolution garnered broad consensus from most Lebanese political forces, supported by a significant number of independent members of parliament whose political orientation differ from those of Hezbollah. Attention soon shifted, however, to the implementation process. While some expressed concern about possible laxity in applying the resolution, others warned about the way in which it might be implemented and the potential implications for civil peace.

The Israeli and US Positions

Israel showed little real interest in the Lebanese cabinet's resolution, dismissing it as a belated and insufficient gesture, while maintaining its military and political escalation. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signaled an intensification of strikes across Lebanon. Concurrently, the Israeli Army Chief of Staff, Eyal Zamir, stated that operations would persist "until Hezbollah is disarmed," claiming that previous warnings to the Lebanese state regarding the party's arsenal had gone unanswered. Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Yisrael Katz authorized ground forces to advance and seize additional positions within Lebanese territory.

On the ground, the escalation was not confined to southern Lebanon but expanded geographically to include waves of intense airstrikes on Beirut's southern suburbs. On the evening of March 5, the Israeli army spokesperson called for the complete evacuation of the area. These strikes targeted several cities and towns in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley and were accompanied by evacuation orders for residents of dozens of Lebanese villages. The most extensive of these orders was issued on March 4, when the Israeli army instructed the residents to evacuate the entire area south of the Litani River, urging them to relocate immediately north of the river, warning them against attempts to return to their homes. These developments coincided with reports of ground incursions at multiple border points, without any clear indication of the scope or ultimate objective of these maneuvers. According to the Lebanese Ministry of Health, the Israeli strikes since the onset of this escalation have resulted in at least 294 fatalities and 1,023 injuries, as of Saturday, March 7, 2026.

The United States, through its ambassador in Beirut, Michel Issa, reportedly conveyed a message to Lebanese President Joseph Aoun affirming that Israel does not intend to escalate provided no "hostile acts" are committed by the Lebanese side." However, following Hezbollah's entry into the conflict on March 2nd, there was a noticeable absence of any direct and detailed official US political commentary on the rapidly unfolding events in Lebanon. Washington's focus appeared centered on the confrontation with Iran and its broader regional repercussions, suggesting a degree of latitude for Israeli actions in Lebanon. At the same time, the

United States adopted a series of precautionary measures related to Lebanon, that began before the latest round of escalation. On February 23, the US Embassy in Beirut ordered the departure of non-essential personnel and their family members due to the “security situation in Beirut.” These measures were later reinforced as tensions continued to escalate, culminating in the announcement that the embassy would be closed “until further notice.”

Challenges and Difficulties in Implementing the Resolution

Implementing the Lebanese government's decision faces significant and complex challenges. The most immediate of these are Hezbollah's public rejection of the resolution and the continuation of the party's military activity on the ground. This suggests that the party does not regard itself as politically or militarily bound by the decree, rendering the prospect of its implementation through consensus, long the prevailing practice in Lebanon, highly unlikely. Furthermore, the Lebanese Army does not seem enthusiastic about enforcing the cabinet's resolution. Leaks from the March 2 cabinet meeting suggests that the Army Commander, General Rudolph Haykal, expressed reservations regarding the resolution's enforcement. The military command fears that a forced disarmament could trigger a direct confrontation between official security forces and Hezbollah. Such a confrontation could escalate into internal Lebanese fighting and potentially lead to divisions within the security forces themselves, whose ranks reflect Lebanon's sectarian composition.

Furthermore, the ongoing Israeli escalation-including airstrikes, incursions, and the geographical expansion of both bombardment and occupation-renders the implementation of the resolution more difficult. The Lebanese state is being tasked with enforcing this mandate amidst a state of open warfare rather than a period of relative stability. This raises fundamental questions about how it can be implemented and what mechanisms could enable its application under the current circumstances. At the same time, Israel has failed to acknowledge the Lebanese cabinet's resolution to ban Hezbollah's weaponry and activities as a basis for ceasing its aggression, withdrawing from Lebanese territory, or addressing other Lebanese demands. On the contrary, Israel has demanded the total evacuation of southern Lebanon (south of the Litani River) and the southern suburbs of Beirut. A move involving the displacement of approximately one million people. The situation is further exacerbated by the Lebanese Army's redeployment from certain border positions to avoid clashes with advancing Israeli forces. This raises the issue of the near-total exposure of the inhabitants of the South in face of Israeli strikes and territorial ambitions, without any clear prospect that the cabinet's resolution can effectively curb the Israeli threat. Consequently, such situation could undermine the decision's legitimacy among significant segments of the Lebanese population, most notably the residents of the south.

Accordingly, although the Lebanese cabinet's resolution garnered broad consensus across most Lebanese parties and political forces, it faces serious difficulties and growing concerns regarding the repercussions of its enforcement, particularly among direct stakeholders, including the security forces, Hezbollah, and its popular base.

Conclusion

Recent developments indicate that Lebanon has entered a highly sensitive and complex phase, in which military escalation intersects with an internal attempt to restore state authority over the “decision of war and peace” and reassert its monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In principle, the government's resolution represents a significant political shift, both in its explicit approach to Hezbollah' arsenal and the level of domestic support it had received. However, this shift continues to clash with a complex security and operational reality, defined by ongoing hostilities, Hezbollah's refusal to comply, and the potential reluctance of

security and military forces to engage in open internal confrontation. This hesitation is further compounded by a fragile and polarized domestic environment and a southern region left exposed to escalating Israeli pressure; all these are factors that could ultimately reverse the broader Lebanese stance on the resolution.

Therefore, the ultimate significance of the resolution lies not only in its political boldness, but also in the Lebanese state's capacity to manage it within a precarious balance: asserting its authority and sovereignty on the one hand, while preventing a descent into internal strife or deeper political schisms on the other. Conversely, Israel's continued dismissal of the Lebanese cabinet's resolution as insufficient, coupled with the expansion of its military operations and the displacement of nearly one million people, undermines the possibility of serving as a swift pathway to de-escalation, and complicates its implementation, both politically and on the ground.

In light of these dynamics, the coming days will determine whether this resolution marks the beginning of a new foundational path toward the Lebanese state regaining its sovereignty and monopoly on the use of force, or whether it will remain merely a high-stakes political gesture whose practical translation will collide with the constraints of power and the realities on the ground. This phase will also reveal whether the initiation of enforcement will trigger internal tensions and conflict, or whether the intensifying Israeli escalation will instead undermine the state's sovereign endeavor, overturn the government's decision, or empty its stabilization of their substance through the imposition of new realities on the ground.