

Lebanese government agrees to US diktat to disarm Hezbollah

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Prime Minister Nawaf Salam's cabinet has publicly committed to disarming Hezbollah, in a move that threatens explosive consequences for Lebanon. The tiny country is caught in the crosshairs of US imperialism's efforts to eliminate Iran's remaining influence in the Middle East.

Hezbollah is an Islamist group allied with Tehran that has the support of Lebanon's Shi'ite party Amal and the impoverished Shi'ite masses.

Hezbollah (Party of God) was formed in the 1980s, dedicated to "the armed struggle" against Israel amid its occupation of Lebanon during the 1975-90 civil war—a proxy war for the competing regional and imperialist powers—and brutal suppression of the Palestinians. Backed by Syria and Iran, the bourgeois religio-nationalist movement drew its support within Lebanon from the impoverished Shi'ite masses to whom it provides vital welfare services. The party advocates corporatism, paternalism and religious obscurantism as a counterweight to the class struggle. With its Shi'ite and Palestinian allies, Hezbollah constitutes the largest bloc in Lebanon's sectarian-based and fragmented political system.

The decision to disarm Hezbollah marks the repudiation of a decades-long policy whereby Lebanon recognised it as the semi-official "resistance" to Israel's occupation of Lebanon and suppression of the Palestinians, symbolised in its slogan of the "people, army and resistance". It comes in the wake of Israel's punishing war on Hezbollah, designed to end its military and political control over the country and establish de facto Israeli control of swathes of border territory, backed by US imperialism, its Gulf allies and France.

On Thursday, the cabinet demanded that the army prepare a plan by the end of the month to disarm Hezbollah to be implemented by the end of the year. The five Amal and Hezbollah cabinet ministers boycotted the meeting.

Hezbollah denounced the plans, stating that disarming could only be discussed in the context of a broader "national defence strategy". Its leader Naim Qassem said, "Where is the state that will keep disaster from Lebanon and where is the army that will protect its borders?"

It would, Hezbollah argued, amount to a surrender to Israeli and US dictates even as the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) continues to violate last November's ceasefire agreement, with near-daily aerial strikes and its occupation of five locations in southern Lebanon.

The cabinet's decision follows visits to Beirut by US ambassador to Turkey and special envoy to Syria and Lebanon Tom Barrack, French President Emmanuel Macron and head of US Central Command General Michael Kurilla making clear that without the government and Hezbollah committing to disarm no aid or loans would be

forthcoming to the bankrupt country. It gives the lie to any notion that the six-million strong state has any political independence or sovereignty.

President Joseph Aoun was shoehorned into the presidency by Washington and its Christian and Sunni Moslem allies (the former March 14 Alliance) last January after a more than two-year vacancy due to the country's ongoing political and economic crisis.

The Washington-imposed ceasefire following US/Israeli war against Lebanon

The Washington-imposed ceasefire last November sought to take advantage of Israel's devastating defeat of Hezbollah. After launching its genocidal war on Gaza in October 2023, Israel used Hezbollah's support for the Palestinians to attack its forces, bases and weaponry in Lebanon and Syria, where it had played a key role, along with Iran and Russia, in propping up the now collapsed Assad regime.

As US imperialism's subcontractor in the resource rich region, Israel sought to eliminate Hezbollah as a military and political force as part of Washington's broader preparations for war against Iran, a critical component of its struggle against Russia and China. At the same time, the US and UK targeted Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force and Iran-backed militias in Iraq, Syria and Yemen to encircle Iran preparatory to all-out war against Tehran.

Israel destroyed Hezbollah's communications systems, detonating hundreds of pagers and walkie-talkies used by its operatives and injuring thousands before launching a devastating, two-month ground invasion of Lebanon. The IDF assassinated Hezbollah's senior leaders, including Hassan Nasrallah and his successor Hashem Safieddine, struck the group's financial, administrative and media facilities and bombed much of its weaponry and missile stockpiles in Lebanon and Syria.

The IDF's October ground invasion of southern Lebanon destroyed or damaged nearly 250,000 homes and 20,000 public buildings, including 13 hospitals and forcing more than 1.2 million, including 400,000 children, to flee their homes. It killed around 4,000 people, mostly civilians, and injured more than 16,000. Israel has continued air strikes on Lebanon in defiance of the ceasefire. The cost of reconstruction is estimated at \$13 billion, about half in direct damages and the rest in broader economic impacts.

This devastation comes amid Lebanon's economic and financial

collapse, signalled by the default on its international loans in March 2020 caused by the looting of the country's wealth by the handful of billionaires that have run the country since the end of the civil war in 1990. The plummeting currency, soaring inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic and high unemployment that followed plunged 80 percent of the population into poverty. In August 2020, the horrific blast at Beirut's port, caused by the storage of hazardous chemicals for six years without proper safety measures, killed more than 200 people, destroying the city's eastern neighbourhoods and sparking mass anger.

The ceasefire agreement called for Hezbollah to remove its fortified positions in southern Lebanon and withdraw its forces to the north of the Litani River, 20 kilometres north of the border with Israel. This largely replicated UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended Israel's largely unsuccessful 2006 war against Hezbollah. It mandated the Lebanese army to begin disarming "non-state actors"—Hezbollah and the Palestinian factions inside Lebanon's 12 refugee camps—by late August, completing the operation within 90 days, with backing from the US, France, and several Arab states.

The US agreed to make additional funds available to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The LAF's total spending last year amounted to \$241 million, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, about half provided by the US, which has given more than \$2.5 billion in the last 20 years, making it the single largest donor. According to Reuters, the Trump administration informed Congress it was diverting \$95 million from the Egyptian military to the LAF.

The agreement also included a US letter granting Israel the right "to take military action" if "Hezbollah looks to be preparing an attack." Tel Aviv could resume hostilities whenever Israel and the US deemed it expedient.

The ceasefire freed Israel from attacks on its northern border as it continued its war of annihilation against the Palestinians in Gaza and occupied Syrian territory, while the US and UK continued attacks on Iranian-backed targets in Yemen, Iraq and Syria. With Hezbollah defanged, Washington's Islamist ally, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), was able to take Damascus and its leader Ahmed al-Shara'a was declared interim president.

Within Lebanon, Hezbollah's defeat enabled Washington to pressure its Sunni and Christian allies to secure the election of a president, General Joseph Aoun, breaching Lebanon's law banning a serving military figure from that position, after more than two years without a head of state. This enabled the appointment of a prime minister, Nawaf Salam, who could be entrusted with preserving Washington and its regional allies' geostrategic interests and ending Iran's longstanding influence in the country via Hezbollah and its allies.

The Salam government toes the Washington line

Salam is the scion of a prominent Beirut family, two of whose members have served as prime minister in the post-World War II period. A lawyer, diplomat and judge at the UN's International Court of Justice, his sole political credentials are that he presided over the toothless Court's equally toothless interim ruling that Israel was plausibly committing genocide in Gaza—its full hearing is not expected until early 2028.

Since coming to office, he has promoted the US line, dismissing armed resistance--Lebanese and Palestinian--and suing for peace followed by normalisation with Israel. He has sought to tighten control along the borders with Syria, while doing nothing to stop Israel's violations of the November ceasefire.

Following the visit of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in May, who called on Beirut to disarm Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon and agreed that Palestinian factions would not use Lebanese territory as a base for launching attacks against Israel, Salam established a group to prepare a plan for their disarming. It follows the army's takeover of six Palestinian armed bases at the end of last year.

Washington lays down the law

But Salam's efforts to rein in Hezbollah, reducing its hold over southern Lebanon and Beirut's port and airport, have not been swift or broad enough to secure the promised financial aid, with the US insisting on the full dismantlement of Hezbollah's heavy arms arsenal.

In July, Barrack, US special envoy to Syria and Lebanon and a multi-billionaire property dealer of Lebanese descent, tweeted, "As long as Hezbollah retains arms, words will not suffice."

Barrack has warned that with Iran gone from the scene, Israel on the offensive and Syria now asserting itself "so quickly that if Lebanon doesn't move, it's going to be Bilad al-Sham again." His reference to the historic region of Syria that once comprised Lebanon and much of Palestine was an implied threat to Lebanon's very existence.

The Trump administration's demand is for the Lebanese army to begin disarming "non-state actors" by late August, completing the operation within 90 days. Washington knows this could precipitate a civil war, under conditions where the Lebanese army lacks both the manpower and the weaponry to suppress Hezbollah. It refuses to force Israel to withdraw from Lebanese territory or stop its aerial attacks. Barrack claimed the White House "can't compel Israel to do anything" adding, "America is not here to compel Israel to do anything."

Hezbollah's leader Naim Qassem rejected a deadline for the group's disarmament and dismissed Washington's demands. He threatened that if Israel were to launch another full-scale war on Lebanon, "missiles would fall" on Israel. Even as the government accepted Barrack's proposal, the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed at key flashpoints to suppress any popular opposition while the Israeli military struck Hezbollah sites in southern Lebanon.

The government's acceptance of the US plan did not satisfy Barrack since it did not have the approval of the entire cabinet after the five ministers walked out prior to the vote being taken. He threatened that without a full vote, there would be no financial aid and Israel would have a free hand to do as it pleases in Lebanon.



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