



## Lebanon

Lebanon in the past year has experienced fundamental, if fragile, changes. Perhaps most significantly, the Iran-backed Shia Islamist group Lebanese Hezbollah has been significantly weakened, having suffered major losses in armed clashes with Israel. In November 2024, Hezbollah and Israel acceded to a ceasefire, mostly ending the fighting that began with the October 2023 outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. Israeli military deployments and operations in Lebanon continue amid disputes over the ceasefire implementation, including deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Lebanon's years-long political stalemate ended in 2025; the country's new government has tasked the LAF with bringing all weapons in the country under state control by the end of the year.

For Congress, key considerations in the coming months may include the LAF's development and deployment, Hezbollah's capabilities and potential disarmament, and Lebanese government economic reforms, as well as the potential reauthorization of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the current mandate for which will expire at the end of August 2025.

**Figure 1. Lebanon**



**Source:** Created by CRS using ESRI and Google Maps.

### Government and Politics

Lebanon's diverse population of 5.3 million people includes Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shia Muslim communities of roughly comparable size. Political posts are divided among the country's various religious groups, or "confessions," to reflect each group's share of the population—although no formal census has been conducted in the country since 1932. The presidency is reserved for a Maronite Christian, the prime minister post for a Sunni Muslim, and the parliament speakership for a Shia Muslim. Since its

independence from France in 1943, Lebanon has often been wracked by upheaval, including a devastating, multi-sided, and confession-oriented civil war from 1975 to 1990 and military interventions by neighboring Syria and Israel. The United States deployed troops at the request of different Lebanese governments in 1958 and 1982-1984, in efforts to bring greater stability to the country.

### Economic Crisis

Lebanon has faced one of the world's most severe economic crises since 2019, when years of high government borrowing, slowing remittances from abroad, and a decline in foreign financial support culminated in a financial collapse as banks shuttered, the currency lost most of its value, and Lebanon defaulted on its foreign debt. Nominal gross domestic product (GDP) shrank from nearly \$55 billion in 2018 to less than \$20 billion in 2021, with a slight recovery in subsequent years. The government responded by reducing or eliminating subsidies on essential goods, and a lack of foreign exchange to finance imports has triggered shortages of medicine, water, and fuel. The World Bank estimates that GDP contracted by a further 7.1% in 2024, with Lebanon suffering \$7.2 billion in economic losses and \$6.8 billion in physical damage from conflict since October 2023. The World Bank projects GDP growth of 4.7% in 2025 based on "anticipated reform progress," moderated inflation, and other factors. Lebanon's new government has taken some steps to implement its economic reform agenda, including legislation to restructure the country's banking sector, amid continued obstacles to reform.

Since 2019, when Lebanon's current economic crisis began, Lebanese politics have undergone a series of shifts. A protest movement that began in 2019 in response to tax hikes forced the resignation of the prime minister; his successor resigned following an August 2020 explosion at Beirut's port that killed over 200 people and caused massive damage. May 2022 parliamentary elections did not result in a clear majority for any political faction, contributing to paralysis on government formation; then-President Michel Aoun's term ended in October 2022, leaving the government in a caretaker capacity and the presidency vacant for over two years until January 2025.

### New 2025 Government

After over two years of deadlock, Lebanon's parliament elected Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) chief Joseph Aoun (no relation to Michel) as president in January 2025. During his leadership of the LAF from 2017 until his election as president, Aoun generally garnered commendations from U.S. officials. Aoun is the fourth consecutive Lebanese president to have previously served as head of the LAF.

President Aoun appointed Nawaf Salam to serve as the next prime minister. On February 8, 2025, Prime Minister Salam formed a cabinet, the first since 2022. For the first time in over a decade, Hezbollah does not appear to have the ability to block government decisions, though several ministers are

reportedly associated with Hezbollah and an allied Shia party (including the finance minister).

## Hezbollah

**Overview.** Since its establishment in the 1980s, Hezbollah has been one of the most powerful actors in Lebanon, operating as a militia force, a political party, and a social services provider. It also has remained a terrorist organization with transnational reach. Hezbollah has participated in Lebanese elections since 1992; it currently holds 13 of 128 seats in parliament. The group first entered the cabinet in 2005, and has held posts in each subsequent Lebanese government until 2025.

According to the Department of State, Iran has provided Hezbollah with “most of its funding, training, weapons, and explosives, as well as political, diplomatic, monetary, and organization aid.” Hezbollah, which long appeared to be the strongest of the armed groups among Tehran’s “axis of resistance,” has repeatedly threatened and engaged in combat with Israel. It has justified its hostile posture by citing Israel’s presence in disputed areas of the Israel-Lebanon-Syria tri-border region. The two sides fought a 34-day war in 2006.

**2023-2024 conflict and ceasefire with Israel.** In October 2023, Hezbollah began firing into Israel in stated solidarity with Hamas, and said it would continue doing so until Israel halted military operations in Gaza. Attacks and threats on both sides killed dozens and displaced tens of thousands. Israeli operations escalated in September and October 2024. Israeli air operations killed most of Hezbollah’s leadership, including longtime Hezbollah head Hassan Nasrallah, and hundreds of fighters before Israel launched ground operations against the group in southern Lebanon. In November 2024, the United States and France brokered a ceasefire in which the Lebanese government agreed to prevent Hezbollah from attacking Israel, and deploy 10,000 LAF soldiers to southern Lebanon; for its part, Israel agreed to withdraw its ground forces by late January 2025.

As of August 2025, Israeli forces remain at five points inside Lebanon and continue to launch airstrikes on Hezbollah targets across the country, as Hezbollah insists that it will not discuss full disarmament until Israel ceases its operations in Lebanon. President Aoun has repeatedly stated in 2025, that the Lebanese government will “hold the monopoly over weapons in the country.”

## U.S. Policy and Assistance

In May 2025, President Donald Trump said Lebanon’s “new president and prime minister brought the first real chance in decades for a more productive partnership with the United States” and that his Administration “stands ready to help Lebanon create a future of economic development and peace with its neighbors.” His comments echo those from some Members of Congress, including Senate Foreign Relations Committee leaders who stated that the LAF “remain the best strategic counterweight to Hezbollah’s influence and need sustained American support.” For years, U.S. support for the LAF has generated debate in Congress between those who back aid for the LAF and those who have argued that U.S. assistance to the LAF is either insufficiently effective or risks falling into the hands of U.S. adversaries. Congress has annually placed certification requirements on U.S. aid to Lebanon in an effort to prevent

its misuse. In July 2025 testimony, Michel Issa, nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, described the LAF as a “reliable partner” that “is now taking tangible steps to enforce the cessation of hostilities and dismantle Hezbollah’s infrastructure in the south.”

Most previous U.S. bilateral assistance to Lebanon has been in Foreign Military Financing to support the LAF, to which the United States has provided \$3 billion since 2006, and Economic Support Funds. The United States has also provided over \$3.5 billion humanitarian aid since FY2019. The suspension in 2025 of most U.S. foreign assistance and the termination of some programs reportedly affected some U.S.-funded activities in Lebanon.

Members of Congress have also taken legislative action related to UNIFIL, which was created after Israel’s 1978 incursion into Lebanon. After the 2006 war, Security Council Resolution 1701 expanded UNIFIL’s mandate to include assisting the Lebanese government in establishing “an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and UNIFIL” between the Blue Line (the UN-demarcated Israel-Lebanon border) and the Litani River (see **Figure 1**). In July 2025, Congress agreed to rescind FY2025 contributions for UNIFIL. In its FY2026 budget request, the Trump Administration described UNIFIL as “an abject failure of a mission existing since 1978” and did not request any funds for it. UNIFIL’s current Security Council mandate will expire at the end of August 2025; the United States has sometimes in the past sought changes to UNIFIL’s mandate as part of reauthorization debates.

## Outlook

The 2024 Israel-Hezbollah war had immense economic and human costs in Lebanon. The weakening of Hezbollah, along with the fall of the Asad regime in Syria (a Hezbollah ally that actively engaged in Lebanon for decades), could facilitate greater political stability in Lebanon. The Lebanese government appears to have taken some tangible steps to implement the November 2024 ceasefire agreement by deploying the LAF in traditional Hezbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon and by raising the once nearly inconceivable prospect of Hezbollah’s disarmament.

At the same time, obstacles remain, including disputes involving Israel, Hezbollah, and the Lebanese government about the nature and sequencing of the potential withdrawal of Israel from remaining positions inside Lebanon, the possible dismantlement of Hezbollah infrastructure, and prospective LAF movements into previous Hezbollah strongholds. Continued Israeli military operations in Lebanon might impede Hezbollah’s recovery but could also fuel domestic political support for the group and its calls to resist or oppose Israel.

Like their predecessors, President Aoun and Prime Minister Salam will likely contend with the interests and views of the diverse array of stakeholders in Lebanon’s complex and arguably unwieldy political system. The prospect of resolving or making progress toward resolving thorny security and economic issues may dim as Lebanon approaches national elections scheduled for spring 2026.

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