

PROTECTING LEBANON'S SOVEREIGNTY

For the Rule of the State, (Not the Rule of the Militia)

I. Lebanon's Defense Strategy: A History of Challenges and Implications

Lebanon's Defense Strategy and Hezbollah

- Hezbollah is an Iran-backed, Shi'ite political party and militant group, which has been led by Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah since 1992. It is comprised of two wings; the first, the Jihad Council, represents its paramilitary arm; the second, the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc party, is its parliamentary arm.
- Hezbollah's troops are not managed, funded, trained, or operated by the Lebanese State. In effect, any affiliations it may have to the Lebanese Republic are incidental and not fundamental to the organization's structure. In contrast to the Lebanese Armed Forces—the other armed force existing in Lebanon—Hezbollah's forces do not swear an oath to Lebanon, its Constitution, or President. Hence, it does not depend on consulting the Lebanese State with respect to conducting their operations.
- In December of 2021, Lebanese President Michel Aoun called for a national conversation on issues pertaining to Lebanon's defense policy.¹ For the last 16 years, Lebanese politics have been defined by the partnership of Aoun—a Maronite Christian—with Hezbollah; the latter was instrumental to getting Aoun and his Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) elected in 2016. However, this alliance has become increasingly threatened as of late; since Lebanon's financial meltdown in late 2019, current FPM leader Gebran Bassil has faced mounting pressure to disentangle himself and his party from Hezbollah.²
- This partnership has additionally soured diplomatic relationships Lebanon had entertained with Arab Gulf countries; furthermore, several Western nations including the United States identify Hezbollah as a terrorist group.³
- Hence, the presence of Hezbollah accounts for one of the primary reasons for the lack of an official Lebanese Defense Strategy; the Lebanese Republic must therefore once and for all assess whether Hezbollah and other militant groups are ultimately national assets or threats.

Security Challenges Facing Lebanon⁴

- Lebanon's security sector faces major geopolitical and structural challenges that call for innovative approaches to security and defense. These challenges include (but are not limited to):
 - Fluid borders that are constantly subject to intense security breaches and disputed demarcations.
 - Continuous Israeli infringements and military conflicts on the southern front (which resulted in two major United Nations Security Council resolutions, 425 and 1701).

¹ Lebanon's Aoun calls for defence dialogue, hinting at friction with Hezbollah | Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanons-president-calls-national-dialog-reach-understanding-defense-economic-2021-12-27/>

² Lebanon's top Christian party signals possible end of Hezbollah alliance | Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanons-top-christian-party-signals-possible-end-hezbollah-alliance-2021-12-23/>

³ Ibid

⁴ Lebanon's Human Security in Defense Strategy

<https://www.kas.de/documents/284382/284431/Human+Security+in+National+Defense.pdf/a4e40d79-b8b2-623b-0f37-8cccf1260b7d?version=1.1&t=1622553346849>

- o Maritime delimitation remains contested between Lebanon and Israel.
- o The widespread presence of non-state armed actors and groups jeopardize state monopoly over the use of force. For example:
 - Tribal armed groups control tariffs in various rural regions in the Bekaa area.
 - Militant Palestinian groups maintain armed presence close to the Syrian borders while Palestinian refugee camps preserve their security control under the 1969 Cairo Agreement.
 - Lebanon also faces the problem of the “duality of arms”, whereby there is a constant threat from the armed activities of Hezbollah and Resistance Brigades.
- o Overlapping roles between different security branches, and political fragmentation influencing the application of the law.
- o Security decisions being tied to a political consensus, often preventing unified and comprehensive responses to security breaches.
- o As a result of Lebanon lacking a National Defense Strategy, the country is unable to have a unified vision on defense that is driven by a set of interests and objectives informed by Lebanon’s strategic environment, the availability of funds, and international support for the Lebanese military. The Council of Ministers has the responsibility of setting a security policy and to sign off on senior military appointments and promotions, with presidential support, whereas the parliament approves cabinet decisions when it comes to defense matters. The parliament’s national defense committee; however, rarely discusses sensitive military affairs. The armed forces in Lebanon have developed two Capabilities Development Plans (CDP), one covering 2013–2017 and the other 2018–2022, focusing narrowly on force development requirements. Both CDPs emerged from limited coordination between the military and the executive branch of government, including the president, prime minister, and defense minister. Additionally, the national defense committee was not consulted on the first CDP that the armed forces presented to foreign donors at the Rome I conference in 2015 to support Lebanon’s armed forces. As a result, the committee mainly discusses decisions on internal security and issues related to municipalities.⁵
- o The idea of a National Defense Strategy (NDS) has been subject to political quarrels over the years, where some political camps deny the need for a strategy beyond the triad of “army, people, and resistance,” while others assert the need for a NDS that guarantees the state’s monopoly over the exercise of violence and defense, wherein disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of all non-state armed actors is enforced.

Legal Ramifications of Lebanon’s Defense Strategy

- o Lebanon lacks a formal Defense Strategy, in spite of being in dire need of one.
- o Article 49 of the Lebanese Constitution decrees that “the President shall preside over the Supreme Defense Council and be the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces which fall under the authority of the Council of Ministers.”⁶ Tangibly, this means that the Supreme Defense Council is tasked with executing the Lebanese state’s defense policies defined by the Council of Ministers.
- o Furthermore, Articles 64 and 65 dictate that the Lebanese Prime Minister, as well as the Council of Ministers, are vested with the power to draft and execute general policy-this includes the country’s Defense Strategy.⁷ However, the large number of ministers comprising the Council (roughly 30) hinders decision making and, as a result, concrete actions taken.

⁵ Which Kind of Armed Forces?

<https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/80964><https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/80964>

⁶ Lebanese Constitution

<https://www.lp.gov.lb/backoffice/uploads/files/Lebanese%20%20Constitution-%20En.pdf>

⁷ Ibid

- o Moreover, Lebanon's policymaking is constrained by international accords it has committed itself to,⁸ These encompass:
 - The 1949 Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement,⁹ issued in order to conclude the Arab-Israeli war in Lebanon;
 - The 1950 Arab League Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation Treaty,¹⁰ which established the Arab League's Joint Defense Council and the Economic Council;
 - The 1945 United Nations (UN) Charter,¹¹ which outlines the purpose of the UN and mandates that its members promote and sustain international peace and stability.
- o Efforts to outline and implement a comprehensive Lebanese National Defense Strategy initially began in 2006, in the wake of the Israel–Hezbollah War of July 2006. The principal point of contention amongst political parties-which has since stifled the development of a Defense Strategy - was Hezbollah's paramilitary forces and the ongoing debate over whether the group ought to be treated as a national threat or asset.¹²

II. Recommendations for Ensuring Lebanon's Sovereignty

- o **Declaring Lebanon as a neutral state in an international conference**, whereby all arms will be unified and restricted in the hands of legitimate institutions such as the Lebanese Armed Forces, under the pretext of a national defense strategy. Lebanon will then be able to develop a unified vision for the protection of its assets. One such asset that is especially crucial to Lebanon's effective sovereignty and prosperity is internal stability.
 - An effective national Defense Strategy is one that is dynamic, in spite of the long-term nature of its policies; hence frequent reiterations are necessitated to account for factors such as emerging technologies and their respective threats. For instance, the United States,¹³ China,¹⁴ and Russia¹⁵ have invested significantly into the cyber security sector. A national defense strategy is of the utmost importance, with greater financial assistance to the Lebanese Army and other armed forces necessary to sustain and safe-guard one of the most essential and non-corrupt institutions in Lebanon.
- o **Implementing all UN Security Council Resolutions**, 1559, 1701 and 1608, (as well as all the 1949 Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement). Additionally, Lebanon should commit to signing and enforcing international treaties to combat money laundering, fiscal criminality and terrorist financing. Lebanon should not be a beacon for any sort of illegal or threatening activity.
 - Mending ties with the international community, and the Arab community in particular, will open up greater economic opportunities for Lebanon, with the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions as one of the main steps towards reconciliation. Lebanon's identity has been marred to fit an image that does not reflect Lebanon's reality. Lebanon has long been a bridge between east and west, and it **can not** survive in isolation, which is why taking this step will serve in restoring Lebanon onto the international scene.

⁸ Defense Strategy: Elusive National Objective | Lebanon Law Review
<http://www.lebanonlawreview.org/defense-strategy/>

⁹ Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement (1949) | ECF
<https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/173>

¹⁰ The Avalon Project: Treaty of Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation Between the States of the Arab League, June 17, 1950
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arabjoin.asp

¹¹ Charter Of The United Nations
<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CTC/uncharter.pdf>

¹² Defense Strategy: Elusive National Objective | Lebanon Law Review
<http://www.lebanonlawreview.org/defense-strategy/>

¹³ Cybersecurity | Homeland Security (dhs.gov)
<https://www.dhs.gov/topics/cybersecurity>

¹⁴ AMCHAM (amcham-shanghai.org)
<https://www.amcham-shanghai.org/en/article/understanding-chinas-cyber-security-law#:~:text=China%E2%80%99s%20Cyber%20Security%20Law%20China%E2%80%99s%20view%20of%20cyber,stored%2C%20transmitted%20by%2C%20or%20created%20on%20those%20servers.>

¹⁵ Russia Cyber Threat Overview and Advisories | CISA
<https://www.cisa.gov/uscert/russia>

o **Drawing the maritime and land borders with Lebanon's corresponding neighbors** in a way that strictly serves Lebanon's strategic and economic interests, and to solidify Lebanon's hold on its national property.

- **Water Security:** Water access and provision are essential to internal stability; Lebanon is strategically geographically situated not only by virtue of having access to more internal water resources (rivers and streams, especially the Litani), but additionally to bodies of water used by the neighboring Israel and Syria - the Orontes and Hasbani rivers - that it could tactically leverage (by building a dam, for example) against them.
- **Oil & Gas:** Lebanon cannot begin to protect its resources if these resources have not yet been defined; **hence concluding border negotiations with both Israel and Syria is mandatory to secure Lebanese interests.**
 - In spite of both Lebanon and Israel being members of the Mediterranean Union as well as the UN, Lebanon elected not to become part of the Mediterranean Gas Forum, in effect alienating itself from local and international conventions pertaining to these matters.
 - Lebanon can become a proactive player in the regional energy sector by becoming a member of prominent conventions surrounding energy production (most notably, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum)
 - There is additionally the matter of having to officially delineate Lebanon's northern border it shares with Syria.

Additionally, securing Lebanon's natural resources will enable greater energy autonomy, decreasing dependence on imports and propelling exports (see Sawa Li Lubnan's policy paper regarding the Lebanese job market.

o Implementing proper protocol and contingency measures to better intercept and respond to disasters, be they natural or man-made. Proper protocol and contingency regarding natural disasters (i.e. not man-made) must be taken into account, especially in countries identified at moderate to high risk of such disasters.

- Lebanon, for its part, is marked by moderate seismicity; several factors have exacerbated the country's vulnerability to earthquakes, including strong urbanization along the coast, especially concentrated in Beirut. Indeed, over 40% of Lebanese live in this area, which is also home to the majority of Lebanon's regulatory bodies (political, **economical**, and administrative).¹⁶
- Furthermore, the prevalence of forested ecosystems, combined with high maximum temperatures and protracted dry seasons, puts Lebanon under significant risk of wildfires and thus requires the country to outline, develop, and implement fire prevention policies.¹⁷
 - Lebanon additionally lacks proper measures to follow in the event of an attack targeting its infrastructure. This was made transparently clear in the handling (at the time and subsequent) of the Beirut Port explosion on August 4th, 2020. Irrespective of the explosion's causes, emergency measures ought to have been identified and outlined prior to the event, especially given Lebanon's being in perpetual conflict with the neighboring Israel since 1948.

¹⁶ Atlas of Lebanon - A Country Facing a High Seismic Risk - Presses de l'Ifpo
<https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/13274>

¹⁷ George Mitri, Mireille Jazi, David McWethy, Assessment of Wildfire Risk in Lebanon Using Geographic Object-Based Image Analysis, Photogrammetric Engineering & Remote Sensing, Volume 81, Issue 6, 2015, Pages 499-506, ISSN 0099-1112
<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/asprs/pers/2015/00000081/00000006/art00019;jsessionid=ara8csl4g9nfr.x-ic-live-02>