

Summary

On August 7, Lebanon approved a US-backed policy proposal to disarm Hezbollah and other non-state actors by the end 2025. The Lebanese Army was tasked with developing and presenting a plan by the end of August. Hezbollah expressed its strong opposition to the initiative and, between August 7 and 8, numerous protests sparked across the country. Despite Hezbollah's military losses since 2023, the group continues to exercise influence. Its opposition to the plan raises concerns over Lebanon's stability.

Recent events and developments

On August 7, the Lebanese cabinet approved a policy proposal by the US to enforce the disarmament of non-state actors, Hezbollah *in primis*, and pursue the Lebanese government's monopoly over weapons in the country. Lebanese authorities confirmed that the US proposal was not discussed in its full form while only its objectives were discussed and approved. The Lebanese Army was tasked with developing a disarmament plan and present it by the end of August and will also be responsible to implement it, to achieve a complete restriction of access to weapons for non-state actors before the end of 2025. The leadership of the group claimed that Hezbollah will treat the decision as if it does not exist, accusing the Lebanese government of committing a "grave sin" by attempting to disarm Hezbollah and by stating that this decision only serves the interests of Israel. The Lebanese government's announcement was met with opposition by some parts of the population supporting Hezbollah, especially after Shiite ministers of the Lebanese executive withdrew from the cabinet session. Furthermore, on August 9, the Lebanese Army warned of potential civil unrest across the country following the government's decision and the persisting violation of ceasefire by Israel. Since August 7, protests were reported in several cities in Lebanon, including Beirut, Nabatiyeh, Baalbek, Hermel, Tyre, Brital, Riyaq, Zahle, Sidon, and Haret Saida. The protests mostly occurred across the main Hezbollah's strongholds in the country. In Beirut, areas affected by the demonstrations were the Msharrafieh, the airport road, and the Saint Michael's Church, near which tires were set on fire by the demonstrators. As a precautionary measure, several Lebanese security forces were deployed in the southern areas of Beirut. No clashes between demonstrators and security forces were reported over the last days. On August 9, six weapons specialists of the Lebanese Army died in an explosion while dismantling weapons inside what is reported to be a former Hezbollah deposit near the village of Zibqin, in the Tyre Governorate.

Impact assessment

The disarmament of Hezbollah and other Lebanese paramilitary groups has been a recurrent political priority for President Joseph Aoun. The measure is central to the Lebanese authorities as it would allow the Lebanese state institutions to regain political and military power in Lebanon, after Hezbollah has maintained a great degree of influence and control on large shares of the country over the last 30 years. Since 2023, Hezbollah has suffered significant losses to Tel Aviv, from the killing of historic leader Hassan Nasrallah to Operation Grim Beeper, which have very likely weakened and downsized the reach and the capabilities of the group, likely pushing the Lebanese government to consider this a convenient timeframe to enforce the plan. Despite the evident military vulnerabilities, Hezbollah continues to be supported by many, especially in southern and eastern Lebanon, as demonstrated by the protests occurred immediately after the disarmament plan was approved, and continues to exercise significant influence on Lebanon's political landscape. The decision to undertake a large scale disarmament program represents an unprecedented attempt by the government to reshape Hezbollah's role in Lebanon and will very likely continue to be met with opposition by the group itself and its supporters, possibly with increasing violence in the form of civil unrest. Direct confrontations between Hezbollah and Lebanese security forces remain less likely. Furthermore, although very unlikely, a deeper IDF intervention into Lebanon cannot be ruled out, given the current trajectory of the conflict and the ongoing operations in the south, which are expected to continue. At the same time, the implementation of the plan will require a combined effort of multiple state agencies, whose degree of permeability against Hezbollah affiliates is likely to allow the group to interfere with the correct execution of the plan, whose success will depend on whether and how Hezbollah decides to cooperate. As of now, Hezbollah's cooperation appear extremely unlikely, raising concerns about Lebanon internal stability in the short term.

Advice from Forth Global

- Pay caution when travelling to Lebanon. Do not travel to Nabatiyeh and Southern Governorates.
- Continue monitoring the situation through local media and stay up to date on the latest demonstrations.
- Avoid people gatherings and refrain from sharing any political opinion publicly or online.
- Gain familiarity with relocation, hibernation and evacuation plans in case domestic tensions escalate.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37

christiaan@forthglobal.com

We provide a wide range of services to prepare your organization and employees for situations like these. More information on our website: www.forthglobal.com