



## Spotlight on Terrorism: Lebanon and Hezbollah February 16-23, 2026

### Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ The IDF continued attacking Hezbollah terrorist targets in south Lebanon as part of enforcing the ceasefire agreement of November 2024 and to prevent the organization's renewed military build-up, possibly in preparation for attacks on the State of Israel. At least eight Hezbollah operatives from the organization's rocket array were eliminated in attacks on Hezbollah headquarters in the Beqa'a Valley.
- ▶ Given the growing tension between the United States and Iran, Hezbollah continued to express full support for Tehran and said a military confrontation would be met with "significant deterrence." According to reports, Iranian military officers were managing Hezbollah's preparations for a possible confrontation with Israel.
- ▶ Hezbollah's secretary general said the organization did not want to initiate a war, however they would not disarm since such a move served Israeli interests. He also said he was confident the organization would overcome the difficulties and claimed the right to "resist."
- ▶ Hezbollah reportedly agreed in principle to a new Lebanese security agreement with Israel, according to which the organization would not attack Israel and would accept supervision of its weapons north of the Litani River, in exchange for the cessation of Israeli attacks, withdrawal of IDF forces and release of Lebanese prisoners.
- ▶ The Lebanese government approved the army's plan to implement the second phase of disarming Hezbollah north of the Litani River within four to eight months, without a specific timetable; Hezbollah ministers did not object.
- ▶ The IDF attacked a Hamas headquarters in the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp in Sidon; Hamas confirmed the death of two operatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

## Israeli-Hezbollah Tension

### The IDF

► The IDF continued attacking Hezbollah terrorist targets as part of enforcing the ceasefire agreement of November 2024 and to prevent Hezbollah from a military buildup and from replenishing its arsenal. The forces attacked weapons depots and military sites in various areas of south Lebanon and eliminated two Hezbollah terrorist operatives. In attacks on three Hezbollah headquarters in the Baalbek area in the Beqa'a Valley, several Hezbollah operatives were eliminated who had been planning to attack Israeli territory (IDF spokesperson, February 16–23, 2026). Media outlets in Lebanon reported at least ten dead and 24 wounded in the attacks in the Beqa'a Valley (Lebanese News Agency, February 20, 2026). Hezbollah confirmed that eight of its operatives, including a senior commander, were killed in the series of attacks in the Beqa'a Valley (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, February 21, 2026).



The scene of one of the attacks in the Beqa'a Valley (*al-Nahar*, February 21, 2026)

### A Possible American Attack in Iran

► Hezbollah is reportedly preparing for a broad Israeli attack and for one on Iran. To that end, the organization's leadership has recently increased the pace of military-security meetings to make operational plans for a possible war. The report claimed preparations were being made not only by Hezbollah commanders, but with the aid of Iranian officers from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. According to the sources, the Iranian officers were not only engaged in restoring the organization's military capabilities but directly supervised its preparations for a war, held meetings with operatives and gave operational instructions, including to rocket units in the Beqa'a Valley region. The assessment is that another confrontation with Israel is a matter of time, not if but when (*al-Arabiya*, February 21, 2026).

► According to "diplomatic" sources, Hezbollah is not currently in a military position which would enable it to launch another broad war, however, the main concern is not with the organization's official leadership, but rather with the extremist elements within it. They are

perceived as particularly loyal to Iran and liable to view confrontation as an opportunity or strategic duty if instructions were received from Iran in the event of a direct threat to the regime's survival. According to such an assessment, even if Hezbollah did not want an escalation, there would a risk of an initiative by extremist elements which could drag the Lebanese arena into a broader confrontation (*Nidaa' al-Watan*, February 20, 2026).

► Given the rising tension, residents of Beirut have reportedly begun to leave several towns and neighborhoods surrounding it and moving to safer areas, lest Hezbollah join the war and enmesh Lebanon in a war again (*al-Nahar*, February 19, 2026).

► The Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament warned of broad escalation caused by American pressure on Iran, and expressed support for Iran (website of the Loyalty to the Resistance faction, February 19, 2026). Hassan Ezzedine, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, claimed that Iran was conducting the talks with the United States from "a position of strength." He claimed Iran would not surrender or relinquish its rights and security, adding that the negotiations were limited to the nuclear file on the basis of reciprocity and respect for its rights. He warned that an attack on Iran would encounter "surprising capabilities not fully exposed to American intelligence," and quoted Iran's leader, Ali Khamenei, saying that the response to American threats was "direct military deterrence" (*al-'Ahed*, February 21, 2026).

► The editor of Hezbollah's daily *al-Akhbar*, Ibrahim al-Amin, said the American focus on Iran had pushed the Lebanese issue to the sidelines and left local actors without a clear address in the United States. According to al-Amin, Hezbollah's opponents pinned hopes on Iran's weakening, which would have consequences for the organization, while Hezbollah said it would not cooperate with measures to disarm it north of the Litani River and might even freeze cooperation if pressure were applied to it. He added that the Lebanese army was trying to find a middle ground which would prevent war with Israel and internal confrontation, while demanding its capabilities be strengthened without permanent dependence on external assistance. Al-Amin said Lebanon's situation was currently confusing, the state was waiting for external decisions, while the feeling was increasing that decisions concerning it depended on developments beyond its borders (*al-Akhbar*, February 20, 2026).



Lebanon caught between the weapons and taxes issue on the one hand, and the elections and regional security on the other (*al-Jumhuriya*, February 21, 2026)

## Hezbollah

► Hezbollah secretary general, Na'im Qassem, gave a speech marking the anniversary of the fallen commanders of the organization.<sup>2</sup> He said the organization did not want war, but would not bow to internal and external pressure and was prepared for "active defense" in the event of an attack, making the distinction between "defense against aggression" and "beginning a war." He criticized the Lebanese government for focusing on disarming the organization, claiming such a move served the objectives of "Israeli aggression" and endangered state sovereignty. Qassem reiterated the commitment to keeping Hezbollah's weapons as a "responsibility to the homeland" and claimed that Israel and the United States were trying to exert pressure to achieve political objectives without war, but the organization would stand firm and "could cause pain" to its enemies. He also warned that the current military and political situation could not continue and said national defense was the responsibility of the government (*al-Manar*, February 16, 2026).



Na'im Qassem (*al-Manar*, February 16, 2026)

<sup>2</sup> On February 16 Hezbollah marks the anniversary of three of its leaders who were eliminated: Sheikh Ragheb Harb, one of the organization's first commanders who was killed in 1984; the organization's secretary general, Abbas al-Mousawi, who was eliminated in 1992; and Hezbollah's military commander, Imad Mughniyeh, who was eliminated in 2008.

► In an interview given by Qassem to mark the first anniversary of the funeral of the former secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, and of his designated successor, Hashem Safi al-Din, he said that from the first moment he was appointed to the position he swore he would act for the people to the best of his ability. He admitted that the current situation was "complex," but rushed to add that they had persevered in the "battle of the brave [the campaign against Israel after the pager attacks in September 2024]" and would "patiently act as required in the coming 15 months." He added that they would "not hesitate" when the time for action came, as their "right to defend and resist"<sup>3</sup> was "legitimate." He said they were prepared for "victory or martyrdom" and that there was no room for defeat, regardless of the sacrifices (al-'Ahed, February 23, 2026).

► The Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament noted the need to "stand firm against Zionist aggression," and condemned the attacks in south Lebanon while calling on the Lebanese regime not to yield to external pressure. The faction criticized promoting the weapons exclusivity plan as a first priority, claiming it was putting the cart before the horse as long as Israel held territory and continued its "violations" (website of the Loyalty to the Resistance faction, February 19, 2026).

► The deputy head of Hezbollah's political council, Mahmoud Qamati, said the Israeli attack in the Beqa'a Valley had "exceeded all previous levels of aggression" against Lebanon. He wondered why Lebanon should still maintain relations with the United States and Europe after they had given nothing to stop the "aggression" or release Lebanese prisoners held in Israel. Qamati said the "resistance" would remain their choice since there was "no other option" (al-Manar, February 21, 2026).

► Hussein al-Hajj Hassan, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, said the organization was becoming more convinced that alongside diplomacy, whose results, he claimed, were limited, the way to deal with Israel was "confrontation." He said confrontation had "many faces and forms," diplomacy was only one of many tools and was not sufficient on its own (Naharnet, February 22, 2026).

► Senior Hezbollah figures continued their criticism of the Lebanese regime because of the continued Israeli attacks and the plan to disarm the organization:<sup>4</sup>

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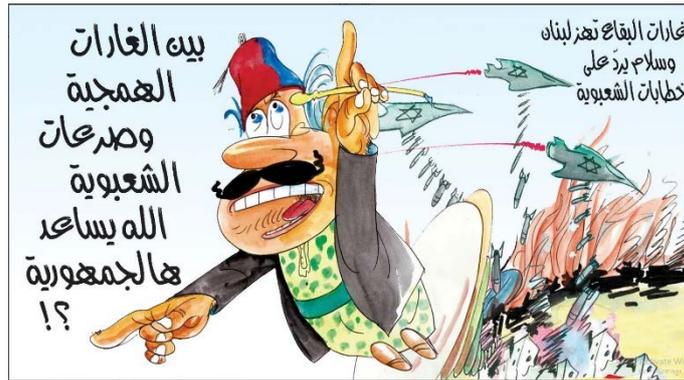
<sup>3</sup> Attack the State of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> See the February 2026 ITIC report, [Rising Tensions between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Government](#)

- ◆ At the inauguration of a monument commemorating senior Hezbollah figure Ali Karaki, Ali Ammar, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, said diplomacy, which had been given an opportunity for more than a year, had not yielded results. He said the internal political decision prevented the army from confronting Israel, whether due to international considerations or fear of escalation. He criticized government policy and represented the state as failing to fulfill its duties toward its citizens, claiming responsibility for defense remained in the hands of the "resistance"<sup>5</sup> (Lebanon 24, February 18, 2026).
- ◆ Hassan Fadlallah, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, criticized the government, stating that instead of focusing on stopping Israeli aggression and enforcing its sovereignty in the south, it was turning in the wrong direction, both in promoting the weapons exclusivity plan north of the Litani River and in imposing taxes which were a burden on the public on the eve of Ramadan. He said the government was content with condemnations and declarations and did not take practical steps against Israel, while the south of the country was continually threatened. He claimed the "resistance" was the most important deterrent factor against attempts at "settlement" and the expansion of Israel's hold of Lebanese land, and said the issue of the south was "existential" and could not be compromised (website of the Loyalty to the Resistance faction, February 17, 2026).
- ◆ Rami Abu Hamdan, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, expressed his anger at the government after the Israeli attacks in the Beqa'a Valley. He said Lebanese blood was not "cheap" and called for a fundamental change in the state's approach to protecting its sovereignty and citizens. He said condemnations and declarations were no longer enough and demanded freezing meetings of the committee monitoring the ceasefire until the attacks stopped as a test of the commitment of the states guaranteeing the agreement. He accused the Lebanese regime of submission, which encouraged Israel to continue its actions, and claimed that a struggle without force was a waste of time and resources (al-Mayadeen, February 21, 2026).

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<sup>5</sup> Hezbollah and the other terrorist organizations operating in Lebanon.



The Arabic on the right reads, "The attacks in the Beqa'a Valley are shaking Lebanon, and Salam responds with populist speeches." On the left it reads, "Between barbaric raids and populist fervor, [will] Allah help this republic?! (*al-Liwaa'*, February 21, 2026)

### The Lebanese Government

- ▶ Lebanon's president, Joseph Aoun, condemned Israel's attack on the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh in Sidon and in the Beqa'a Valley, calling them "hostile acts" to sabotage the Lebanon's diplomatic efforts to establish stability. Aoun called on the states guaranteeing the ceasefire agreement to assume their responsibility, take action to halt the attacks and exert pressure on Israel to respect international decisions in a manner that would preserve Lebanon's sovereignty (X account of the Lebanese presidency, February 21, 2026).
- ▶ Aoun received an official invitation from the president of France, Emmanuel Macron, to act as co-chair of the international conference to support the Lebanese army and the Lebanese internal security forces to be held in Paris on March 5, 2026. Macron said Aoun's participation would send the message that France was committed to Lebanon's stability and the restoration of its full sovereignty. The objective of the conference is to reaffirm the political, financial and technical support of the international community for Lebanon's security institutions and to mobilize coordinated assistance in accordance with the priorities set by the government (X account of the Lebanese presidency, February 19, 2026).
- ▶ Informed sources said diplomatic efforts were being conducted to advance a security agreement between Israel and Lebanon which would go beyond the framework of the current ceasefire agreement. According to claims, in principle Hezbollah is not opposed. The proposal reportedly included an American demand for a Hezbollah commitment to refrain from any military action against Israeli communities and for an arrangement that would prevent it from using its weapons, alongside a mechanism to coordinate with the Lebanese army which would supervise weapons depots north of the Litani River. From Israel, with American guarantees, it would involve the cessation of attacks, withdrawal from some disputed points and the release of Lebanese prisoners held in Israel. According to the sources, the discussions relied on a

previous Egyptian proposal according to which forcible disarmament was not feasible and could lead to internal confrontation in Lebanon. It was further claimed that Hezbollah was not expected to sabotage such a move, subject to a change in the composition of the Lebanese delegation, while parliament speaker Nabih Berri had reservations about halting the activity of the existing mechanism (*al-Akhbar*, February 17, 2026).

### **Lebanon's Security Forces**

► Lebanon's prime minister, Nawaf Salam, stated that implementing the plan to disarm Hezbollah and secure the southern border required recruiting about 10,000 new soldiers to the Lebanese army. He said the measure was also necessary in light of the need to close security gaps created by the reduction of UNIFIL forces in the south. He said that expanding the military order of battle was one of the main reasons for the economic measures his government was promoting, including taxes and various decrees affecting the public sector in particular, as part of budgetary preparations for a change in the security structure of the southern part of the country (*al-Nahar*, February 20, 2026).

► The commander of the Lebanese army, General Rodolph Haykal, met with the ambassadors of the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and France in Lebanon. They discussed preparations for the conference to support the Lebanese army and the preparatory meeting to be held in Egypt on February 24, 2026. The importance of strengthening the army's capabilities in light of its central role in preserving Lebanon's security and stability was noted (X account of the Lebanese army, February 18, 2026).

► The commander of the Lebanese army, Rodolph Haykal, met with President Joseph Aoun and briefed him on his visit to Saudi Arabia and his participation in the Munich Security Conference (X account of the Lebanese presidency, February 18, 2026).



**Haykal and Aoun (X account of the Lebanese presidency, February 18, 2026)**

► Lebanon's internal security forces arrested a resident of the town of Ansar on suspicion of collaboration with Israel. Investigation reportedly revealed that the suspect had transferred

sensitive information which contributed to attacks carried out in the Ansar area in recent months, and had direct contact with Israeli elements, including meetings outside Lebanon. The sources noted the individual had operational importance and was not a marginal figure (Lebanon Debate, February 17, 2026). It was later reported that the Machdar family from the town of Ansar announced public disavowal of their relative, Ahmed Machdar, after, according to them, a security investigation had proved he had collaborated with Israel (*al-Diyar*, February 21, 2026).

## Disarming Hezbollah

### Preparation for the Second Phase

► On February 16, 2026, the commander of the Lebanese army, Rodolph Haykal, presented the Cabinet meeting with the second phase of the plan for state exclusivity over weapons, which would focus on the area north of the Litani River. After the meeting Lebanon's minister of information, Paul Morcos, stated the army's plan had been approved and implementation was supposed to take place within four months with the possibility of an extension (Lebanese News Agency, February 17, 2026). Later, Morcos noted that the government hoped the army would succeed, but admitted that the process could last up to eight months due to a shortage of manpower and equipment and Israeli Air Force attacks on Lebanon (Sky News Arabia, February 18, 2026).



**Lebanese cabinet meeting (IM Lebanon, February 16, 2026)**

► Reportedly, the meeting passed without significant confrontations between supporters of the plan and opponents from Hezbollah and Amal, the result of prior contacts and coordination for an agreed-upon formula. The state would continue with the plan and Hezbollah would not retreat from its conditions, but implementation would advance cautiously and **without specific timetables**. It was further reported that Haykal said the army had already begun confiscating visible weapons, but **did not commit to a specific final date**, presenting a flexible range of four to eight months and even beyond, according to security circumstances, political

agreement and logistical readiness. However, it was noted that the very presentation of a time frame for removing the weapons was perceived as significant, also the result of external contacts and Haykal's visits to the United States and Saudi Arabia, and was expected to affect the scope of international support and the success of the March Paris conference (Lebanon 24, February 17, 2026).

► Government sources said the Cabinet decision would give the army political cover to continue implementing the plan. According to the sources, this time the army's mission enjoyed "political momentum" because Hezbollah ministers did not oppose the plan, as they had in previous meetings. Security sources added that implementing the second phase would not be only military but would combine a security-political approach to avoid confrontation with any Lebanese "armed faction"<sup>6</sup> despite the determination to carry out the mission. According to the report, the implementation of the plan would differ from the activity south of the Litani River because of the political complexity, demographic overlap and geographic differences between the areas (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 18, 2026).

► Western diplomatic sources said the international community's initial response to the government's decision regarding the plan for the second phase was positive. They said the timetable was considered "realistic," especially in light of Hezbollah's lack of cooperation and the limited capabilities of the Lebanese army. They added that the decision had assisted preparations for the conference in Paris. A government source said Hezbollah ministers had not expressed opposition because of a desire to avoid escalation, especially given the talks between Iran and the United States (*Nidaa' al-Watan*, February 18, 2026).

Diplomatic sources said that before the Paris conference a preliminary conference would most likely be held in Cairo, attended by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, the United States and France, as well as representatives of European states, the EU and the UN. The Lebanese delegation would be headed by the commander of the army, General Rodolph Haykal. However, the key to obtaining support lay in the hands of the United States and Saudi Arabia, and at this stage there was no full backing. One reason was the issue of the army's deployment north of the Litani River, which cast doubt on Lebanon's ability to obtain all its demands at the conference (*al-Nashra*, February 21, 2026).

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<sup>6</sup> Terrorist organization.

► According to a new YouGov survey conducted in Lebanon, 63% of respondents expressed support for the Lebanese government's efforts to disarm Hezbollah, compared to only 9% who opposed the plan (Secure America Now, February 18, 2026).

### **Hezbollah's Position**

► Members of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament remained defiant regarding the demand to disarm, calling it an attempt to weaken Lebanon while Israel continued with its "aggression:"

◆ Hassan Ezzedine claimed Hezbollah's weapons were "legitimate" legally, nationally and popularly, because of the "existential threat" that Israel posed to Lebanon. He claimed it was the right of the Lebanese people, of all its sects, to defend itself as long as the state had not made a political decision to arm and equip the Lebanese army so it could fulfill its mission to defend the country. He added that the committee monitoring the ceasefire had so far failed to force Israel to implement the agreement. Therefore, he said, Lebanon, which is committed to the ceasefire, was not required to take additional steps, including disarming Hezbollah, as long as Israel did not meet its commitments, and the responsibility lay with the states guaranteeing the agreement (Russia al-Youm, February 18, 2026).

◆ Ali al-Miqdad said no strategy, security or defensive, could be discussed if an Israeli soldier remained on Lebanese soil. He added that disarming Hezbollah also could not be discussed if Israeli aggression continued or if Lebanese citizens remained in prisons in Israel (al-Manar, February 18, 2026).

◆ Ali Fayyad said Israel sought to disarm the "resistance" not as a condition for withdrawal, but as preparation for continuing to hold positions in Lebanese territory and for creating security zones in Lebanon and Syria. He claimed the measure, conducted with American backing, did not guarantee security, sovereignty or stability for Lebanon, but reflected a dangerous concession which harmed national interests and justified the continuation of the "resistance" (*al-Akhbar*, February 22, 2026).

### **Hezbollah's Opponents**

► The minister of industry from the Christian Lebanese Forces Party, Joe Issa al-Khoury, said the exclusivity of weapons in the hands of the state was a fundamental condition for restoring stability and advancing reforms, and expressed absolute opposition to any weapon outside the legitimate framework. He said the government was examining the Lebanese army's

capabilities of deploying in Hezbollah's areas of influence, and noted that handing disarmament on the organization's initiative was preferable and would help ease tensions. He said the lack of Hezbollah's cooperation and the continued existence of non-institutional weapons disrupted the functioning of institutions and delayed economic recovery (al-Hadath, February 17, 2026).

## The Palestinians in Lebanon

► On February 20, 2026, the IDF attacked a Hamas headquarters in the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp in Sidon, which had been used for preparations to attack IDF forces in Lebanese territory and for training terrorists in preparation for attacks (IDF spokesperson, February 20, 2026). Hamas confirmed that two of its operatives had been killed in the attack (al-Manar, February 20, 2026). According to claims, the building had previously been used by the joint Palestinian security force in the refugee camp, and had recently been rented to a private entity with the aim of converting it into a food distribution center (Lebanese News Agency, February 20, 2026).



**The scene of the attack in Ain al-Hilweh (al-Risalah, February 20, 2026)**

► The Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Committee of the Lebanese Parliament discussed the UNRWA situation after a cut had been made in the agency's funding. The meeting was attended by the Palestinian Authority ambassador to Lebanon, Muhammad al-Asaad, UNRWA director in Lebanon, Dorothy Klaus, and the head of the Lebanese working group responsible for addressing issues of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Ambassador Ramez Dimashkieh. The committee chairman, Fadi Aalmeh, said reducing the agency's budget directly affected education, health and stability in the refugee camps, and noted that in Lebanon there were 61 schools and 26 medical centers serving about 230,000 refugees. The committee called for action to reduce the consequences of the cut and to find solutions. At the same time, a draft bill was presented to regulate the legal status of Palestinian refugees, anchoring socio-economic rights under limitations, preserving the principle of non-naturalization and the [so-

called] "right of return,"<sup>7</sup> and not imposing an additional burden on the state budget (al-Markazia and Lebanon 24, February 18, 2026).

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<sup>7</sup> The return of the Palestinian refugees to their places of residence before the 1948 War of Independence, effectively eliminating the State of Israel.