



Disarming the Palestinian Factions in Lebanon

May 8, 2025

Overview¹

- ▶ The Palestinian factions² in Lebanon have maintained an armed presence in the refugee camps for decades without interference from the authorities. In recent years, the Hamas branch in Lebanon has become the most powerful military force among the factions, and its active involvement in fighting alongside Hezbollah in the latest conflict drew significant public and political attention.
- ▶ The ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon in November 2024, which ended the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, led the Lebanese authorities to declare their willingness to institute a state monopoly of weapons throughout the country. The declaration was reinforced under the new president, Joseph Aoun, and the new government headed by Nawaf Salam.
- ▶ The rocket fire attacking northern Israel at the end of March 2025 and the exposure of Hamas operatives as responsible led the authorities to warn the movement not to threaten national security. Following the warning, in an unprecedented move Hamas handed the Lebanese army suspects involved in the rocket fire.
- ▶ Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas is expected to visit Lebanon in the second half of May 2025, and reportedly will give the Lebanese government the legitimacy to disarm Hamas and the other armed factions in the country's refugee camps.
- ▶ At this stage, it is unclear whether Lebanese security forces intend to act militarily to collect the weapons in the country's Palestinian refugee camps or to simply reorganize relations and increase coordination over weapons use. In ITIC assessment, a successful assertion of state authority over the Palestinian factions could set a precedent for a similar move against Hezbollah, which is considered a more complex and sensitive challenge for Lebanon. As a result, Hezbollah may attempt to prevent a forceful move by the Lebanese army against the Palestinian factions but may also assist in resolving the issue through dialogue.

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

² Terrorist organizations.

Armed Palestinian Factions in Lebanon

► For decades, various armed Palestinian organizations have maintained a military presence in Lebanon, concentrated in the refugee camps spread across the country.³ The presence of the Palestinian organizations is anchored in the Cairo Agreement signed by the Lebanese government and the PLO in 1969.⁴ Over time, the refugee camps became semi-autonomous territories beyond the control of Lebanese security authorities, who generally refrain from entering them.

► The issue of “Palestinian weapons” in Lebanon has been a highly sensitive topic for years, partly the result of the lessons learned during the Civil War in the 1980s and the high price Lebanon paid when its territory was used as a base for operations against Israel without regard for Lebanon’s own national and security interests. However, due to the political complexity regarding Hezbollah and public sensitivities concerning the Palestinian “struggle,” authorities have long avoided dealing with the issue of Palestinian refugees in general and armed factions in particular.

► In recent years, the Hamas branch in Lebanon has been the most powerful armed military force among the Palestinian factions in the country. Estimated to have around 1,500 trained fighters, it has a presence in refugee camps in south Lebanon and the Beirut area and operates in coordination with Hezbollah and the Palestine branch of Iran’s Qods Force under Mohammed Saeed Izadi (Haj Ramadan).⁵ The Hamas branch in Lebanon took an active part in attacks on Israel, including during Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021 and alongside Hezbollah in the fighting during the Gaza Strip War, mainly through rocket fire targeting northern Israeli communities.⁶

³ According to UNRWA, around half a million registered Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon, though the actual number is believed to be higher. Approximately 45% of Palestinians in Lebanon reside in the 12 recognized refugee camps throughout the country (UNRWA, February 2025).

⁴ The agreement was intended to regulate the presence of armed Palestinian organizations in Lebanon and allowed the PLO to operate against Israel from Lebanese territory.

⁵ For further information, see the January 2025 ITIC report, "[Activities of Saeed Izadi, Head of the Qods Forces’ “Palestine Branch,” Reflected in Captured Document.](#)"

⁶ For further information, see the August 2024 ITIC report, "[The Organizations Assisting Hezbollah in Combat Against Israel.](#)"



**Palestinian gunmen at the entrance to the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp
(Palestinian Media Center, August 21, 2017)**

The Lebanese Government Commitment to Enforcing a State Monopoly on Weapons

- ▶ On November 27, 2024, the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon went into effect, halting the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah which began on October 8, 2023. Under the agreement, the Lebanese government committed to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and its predecessors⁷ to prevent the reestablishment and rearmament of armed groups in Lebanon and to monitor the sale or supply of weapons and related materials into the country. The agreement also stated that production of weapons and related materials within Lebanon would be regulated and supervised by the Lebanese government.⁸
- ▶ On January 9, 2025, Lebanese army commander General Joseph Aoun was elected as the new president, after the position had remained vacant since October 31, 2022. In his inaugural speech before the Lebanese Parliament, Aoun said he would realize the state's monopoly on carrying weapons throughout the country. He also said that he would work to eliminate the existence of mafias and "security zones" (Lebanese National News Agency, January 9, 2025).
- ▶ On February 26, 2025, the Lebanese Parliament approved the new government headed by Nawaf Salam in a vote of confidence (al-Nashra, February 26, 2025). According to the government's policy guidelines, the president's directives to realize the state's monopoly on weapons would be fully implemented, as would UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1559 from 2004 calls for the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias in the country and the withdrawal of all foreign forces stationed in Lebanon, alongside the extension of state authority over all parts of Lebanese territory. Resolution 1701, adopted at the end of the Second Lebanon War in 2006, also calls for the implementation of Resolution 1559.

⁸ For further information, see the December 2024 ITIC report, "The ceasefire and the positions of the forces operating in Lebanon."

Regarding the Palestinian issue, it was stated that the state would maintain its right to enforce full authority over all Lebanese territory, including the Palestinian refugee camps, while preserving the dignity and human rights of the Palestinians living in Lebanon (Lebanese government website, February 8, 2025).

Lebanese Authority Actions Against Armed Palestinian Factions

► Lebanese army forces began operating against the military facilities of the Palestinian factions even before Aoun was elected. In December 2024, the Lebanese army took control of the Jamila Ain al-Buwaydah military compound and a tunnel in the Zahle area in the Beqa'a, which belonged to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC). In addition, large quantities of weapons, ammunition and military equipment were confiscated. In Lebanon, the seizure of the facilities was presented as a step toward realizing the state's sovereignty over its territory (Lebanon 24 and al-Nahar, December 23, 2024). Abu Rateb, a “senior security official” of the PFLP-GC in Lebanon, stated that the organization had abandoned all its posts in Lebanon outside the Palestinian refugee camps and handed them over to the Lebanese army, along with the weapons and equipment within them. He claimed the move had been agreed upon with the Lebanese army out of faith in Lebanon and its institutions. He also thanked the Lebanese people for “hosting the Palestinian people” (al-Akhbar, December 23, 2024). The camps were abandoned by the PFLP-GC following the loss of its most important patron, the Assad regime in Syria, which fell on December 8, 2024.

► On March 22 and 28, 2025, rockets were fired twice at northern Israel, violating the ceasefire agreement. The Lebanese army and security services identified those responsible as Lebanese and Palestinian operatives affiliated with Hamas. Several suspects were arrested in possession of vehicles and equipment used in the two incidents (X account of the Lebanese army, April 18, 2025). Subsequently, a raid was carried out on an apartment in the Sidon-Zahrani area, during which additional suspects were arrested and rockets were seized, which were believed to be intended for further attacks (X account of the Lebanese army, April 20, 2025; al-Arabiya, April 20, 2025).



Right: The improvised launcher used to fire rockets toward Kiryat Shmona (X account of the Lebanese army, March 29, 2025). Left: Rockets found in possession of the operatives (X account of the Lebanese army, April 20, 2025)

- ▶ The government representative to the military court in Lebanon, Judge Fadi Aqqi, filed indictments against nine persons on charges of forming an armed group with the intention of undermining the authority and prestige of the state, firing rockets at Israel, collecting medium and heavy weapons and military equipment, preparing for further operations which were not carried out due to circumstances beyond their control, and possessing weapons, explosives and rockets. It was also stated that the defendants, most of whom were Lebanese and all of whom were Hamas operatives, had violated the measures taken by the Lebanese state to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and exposed Lebanon to the risk of hostile actions (Lebanon Debate, May 5, 2025).
- ▶ Although Hamas representatives denied any involvement in the rocket fire, the finding of the investigation refocused the discourse on the freedom of action Hamas enjoyed in Lebanon and the risks the movement's activity posed to the state. The movement was perceived as acting against Lebanon's interests and endangering the fragile calm achieved after months of fighting with Israel (Naharnet, April 17, 2025).
- ▶ Reportedly, President Aoun decided to disarm Hamas in Lebanon and ordered that the movement be prevented from engaging in any military activity in the country. According to the report, this decision will later apply to additional Palestinian factions (Nidaa al-Watan, April 18, 2025).
- ▶ On May 2, 2025, the Lebanese Supreme Defense Council convened, attended by President Aoun and Prime Minister Salam, to discuss Hamas activity in Lebanon and the disarmament of armed Palestinian factions. The director general of the council, Muhammad Mustafa, stated that the government would warn Hamas against using Lebanese territory for operations that threaten national security. He emphasized that the state would take the necessary steps to stop

any action harming Lebanese sovereignty. Prime Minister Salam said Hamas and any other "entity" had to be prevented from undermining national security and the country's stability. It was also noted that although Lebanon respected the Palestinian issue, it had to ensure the collection of illegal weapons to keep the Palestinians from dragging Lebanon into wars that endangered it (al-Nashra, May 2, 2025).



**Meeting of the Supreme Defense Council of Lebanon chaired by President Aoun
(X account of the Lebanese presidency, May 2, 2025)**

- ▶ The head of Lebanon's general security directorate, General Hassan Shaqir, then summoned Hamas' representative in Lebanon, Ahmed Abd al-Hadi, and warned him not to undertake actions which would undermine Lebanon's sovereignty. In response, Abd al-Hadi stated he was willing to hand over the four Palestinians wanted for firing rockets at northern Israel in late March 2025, including the planner of the attack, and said the rocket fire was an individual act and not a decision made by Hamas. It was also reported that Hamas promised not to violate Lebanese sovereignty in the future (al-Arabiya, May 3, 2025). During the meeting Hamas was warned not to undertake any military or security activity that threatened Lebanon's security and had to comply with state law. Shaqir also told Abd al-Hadi that if the wanted men were not handed over soon and no cooperation was shown, the Lebanese authorities would take stricter measures (Asas Media, May 5, 2025).
- ▶ Therefore, in a step seen as an attempt to appease the Lebanese leadership, Hamas handed over three of the four wanted Palestinians to the Lebanese army. According to reports, one was turned over at the entrance to the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp in Sidon, while another was turned over at the entrance to al-Buss camp in Tyre, indicating that the army still kept out of the camps (X account of the Lebanese army, May 4–6, 2025). The unprecedented move reflects the Hamas leadership's understanding of the risk to its continued activity in Lebanon, especially as Hezbollah's political standing has been weakened and the organization is under considerable internal pressure, making it unable to provide Hamas with the protection which

it had enjoyed and under which it had operated freely for years. Reportedly, at a meeting of the new chairman of the Lebanese–Palestinian Dialogue Committee, Ramez Dimashqiya, and the Palestinian factions, including Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), attended by the Palestinian ambassador to Lebanon, Ashraf Dabbour, Dabbour expressed the PLO’s willingness to give up Palestinian weapons. However, “Palestinian sources” noted there was not consensus among the factions on the issue. Hezbollah demanded that Hamas reach understandings with it on the weapons issue before reaching agreements with the Lebanese government. It was also reported that Palestinian factions in al-Beddawi camp in Tripoli breached the security fence erected by the Lebanese army to separate the camp from adjacent neighborhoods, raising fears of clashes in the area, although Fatah in the camp expressed willingness to hand over its weapons (Asas Media, April 26, 2025).

► The disarmament of armed Palestinian factions is expected to gain momentum with the upcoming visit of Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas to Lebanon, scheduled for May 19, 2025. According to reports, Mahmoud Abbas will call on Palestinian factions fighting the “occupation” to also disarm. He is also expected to establish a security committee to oversee the disarmament process and set a timetable for handing over weapons (Middle East Eye, May 4, 2025). It was further reported that during his meeting with President Aoun, Mahmoud Abbas might announce the cancellation of the 1969 Cairo Agreement and express the Palestinian Authority’s willingness to cooperate with Lebanese authorities to regulate the status of the Palestinian refugee camps, in exchange for a Lebanese guarantee to prevent a shift in the balance of power in the camps and the takeover by Hamas and the PIJ (Asas Media, April 27, 2025). Weakening Hamas in Lebanon also serves Mahmoud Abbas’ narrow political interest as part of his long-standing campaign against the movement’s dominance in Palestinian leadership.

► The Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese daily al-Akhbar reported that a decision had been made not only to disarm Hamas, but also to make it difficult to continue its activity on Lebanese soil, as well as that of the PIJ branch, in light of the demand to disarm Hezbollah. However, “informed sources” noted that it was easier for Lebanese authorities to deal with the Palestinian issue because it does not embarrass them, unlike having to deal with Hezbollah. The report also stated that Mahmoud Abbas’ visit was meant to pressure Fatah, which appears

ready to hand over or organize its weapons, and Lebanese security forces will play the larger role in the refugee camps (al-Akhbar, May 6, 2025).