Spotlight on Terrorism: Hezbollah and Lebanon July 20-27, 2026

Trending

► Lebanese President Joseph Aoun's visit to Washington strengthened his standing as the primary Lebanese interlocutor with the United States.

► The framework agreement between Lebanon and Israel moved into the phase of deploying the Lebanese army to the pilot areas in south Lebanon.

► Fundamental disagreements surfaced between supporters and opponents of the framework agreement regarding the significance of the pilot areas.

► Hezbollah did not respond despite the activation of the framework agreement and claims of Israeli violations.

► Iran is increasing its control over Hezbollah's decision-making.

Overview[1]

► Lebanese President Joseph Aoun met with the American president at the White House and noted the importance of activating the framework agreement and "dealing with" Hezbollah's weapons while avoiding an internal Lebanese confrontation.

► Activating the first stage of the framework agreement began with the deployment of the Lebanese army in three pilot areas towns in south Lebanon.

► Prime Minister Salam visited the south Lebanese town of Zawtar al-Gharbiya, where he said the army's deployment was the first step toward the return of the residents and reconstruction. Hezbollah claimed there had been no Israeli withdrawal and an IDF shooting incident involving Lebanese army forces proved Israel still controlled south Lebanon.

► Hezbollah accused the IDF of a series of ceasefire violations, including airstrikes which wounded two members of Hezbollah's medical organization; Hezbollah did not respond to the alleged attack.

► Iranian leader Mojtaba Khamenei wrote a letter to Hezbollah in which he said Iran supported the complete end of "Zionist aggression" in accordance with the memorandum

[1] Click https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en to subscribe and receive the Amit Institute's daily updates as well as its other publications.

of understanding with the United States. The Iranian leadership was reportedly disappointed with Hezbollah's performance in the confrontation with Israel and was increasing its control over the organization's decision-making.

► Syrian President al-Sharaa said Syria would not intervene militarily in Lebanon to deal with Hezbollah's disarmament, adding that he supported the Lebanese state's monopoly on arms.

The President of Lebanon's Visit to the United States

► On July 21, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun met at the White House with the American president. They discussed the activation of the Israeli-Lebanese framework agreement, completing the ceasefire, continued United States support for the Lebanese army, encouraging American investment in Lebanon and the resumption of direct flights between the United States and Lebanon. Aoun described Lebanon's difficult internal situation but claimed the country was not on the brink of collapse and required continued American assistance to strengthen its institutions and sovereignty. He reiterated that Hezbollah's weapons were a Lebanese issue which had to be addressed, but the solution should advance within a political and national framework while avoiding "internal deterioration" (*Nidaa al-Watan*, *al-Joumhouria*, July 22, 2026).

► Speaking to reporters during the meeting at the White House, Aoun said the objective of the framework agreement was to end the war, stabilize south Lebanon and lay the foundations for a long-term political settlement. He said there was no need for additional parliamentary approval, adding that the ultimate objective was to permanently end the state of hostility between Lebanon and Israel, but conditioned progress toward peace on the completion of Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon and the cessation of its military activity (Lebanese presidency X account, July 21, 2026).

The meeting at the White House (Lebanese presidency X account, July 21, 2026)

► American sources reported that Aoun submitted a road map for the framework agreement, which included Hezbollah's disarmament, expanding the deployment of the Lebanese army in the pilot areas, strengthening the army's capabilities with United States assistance and American pressure on Israel to complete its withdrawal from south Lebanon. The document was reportedly being reviewed by the American administration and the intelligence community (al-Hadath, July 21-22, 2026).

► Media outlets identified with the Lebanese government and the opposition to Hezbollah described the visit as a diplomatic achievement for President Aoun and the opening of a new chapter in Beirut-Washington relations. They claimed the meeting showed Lebanon's return to the status of a legitimate partner for the United States administration after years of stagnation (*Nidaa al-Watan*, *al-Joumhouria*, July 22, 2026). Media outlets affiliated with Hezbollah claimed the meeting had not produced guarantees of a full Israeli withdrawal, the prevention of Israeli military operations or broad economic assistance and it was therefore premature to conclude that it represented a breakthrough. They further claimed that the visit primarily illustrated the depth of American involvement in managing the "Lebanon file" and using it to advance Hezbollah's disarmament as part of the framework agreement. Although Aoun did not discuss the possibility that additional countries might join the Abraham Accords, Hezbollah-affiliated media outlets linked the framework agreement to Lebanese progress toward normalization [of diplomatic relations between Israel and Lebanon] (*al-Akhbar* and *al-Madan*, July 21-23, 2026).

Skepticism of Aoun's White House visit as a diplomatic achievement which restored Lebanon's honor. The question mark indicates criticism of the gap between the leadership's optimistic declarations and the absence of tangible achievements on the ground (*al-Liwaa*, July 22, 2026)

► Aoun gave a speech at a dinner hosted in his honor by Lebanon's ambassador to the United States, Nada Hamadeh Maoud. He said Hezbollah could be disarmed as part of a "gradual process" which would include the completion of Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon, the full deployment of the Lebanese army throughout the country and the launch of a national program to reconstruct the "affected areas" under the management of state institutions. He said it was impossible to build a secure, stable state as long as more than one "security" power center existed and Lebanon's sovereignty required one state, one army and one security decision (MTV Lebanon and LBCI, July 22, 2026).

► The American senior adviser for Arab affairs, Massad Boulos, said that if requested by Aoun and if necessary, the United States president would be prepared to hold talks with Hezbollah as part of a peace initiative. According to Boulos, the president viewed the framework agreement as a significant achievement for the United States, Israel and Lebanon and was open to dialogue with all relevant parties to promote regional stability. However, Boulos said all "armed groups"[2] in Lebanon, especially Hezbollah, had to cooperate with the framework agreement and state institutions, particularly the Lebanese army. He warned that failure to cooperate could undermine Lebanon's security, stability and reconstruction efforts (al-Jadeed, July 27, 2026).

[2] Terrorist organizations.

Direct Negotiations and the Israel-Lebanese Framework Agreement

The Pilot Areas

► On July 20, the United States Department of State announced that activating the pilot areas had begun in the villages of Froun, Zarifah and Zawtar al-Gharbiya in accordance with the framework agreement and under the supervision of the Military Coordination Group for Lebanon (MCG4L) (State Department website, July 20, 2026). The IDF confirmed that the "safe area pilot" had begun in cooperation with United States Central Command (CENTCOM) and the Lebanese army and that teams from the three militaries were coordinating and planning the ongoing activation of the agreement. If Hezbollah committed violations, the IDF would act through the coordination group while retaining freedom of action to remove threats to IDF forces deployed in the security zone in south Lebanon. The ultimate objective of the pilot, and of the agreement as a whole, was to disarm Hezbollah (IDF Spokesperson, July 20, 2026).

► The following day, the Lebanese army began deploying in south Lebanese town of Zawtar al-Gharbiya while connecting with the military coordination mechanism. The forces reportedly surveyed the land, cleared mines and unexploded ordnance and prepared the area, but instructed residents not to return to their homes yet (Lebanese army X account, July 21, 2026). The Lebanese army claimed Israeli forces had approached their positions and fired near their units during the redeployment in the Zawtar al-Gharbiya area (Lebanese army X account, July 21, 2026). The IDF stated that a Lebanese force had crossed the coordination line and entered Zawtar al-Sharqiya without prior coordination (IDF Spokesperson, July 21, 2026). In Froun and Zarifah, the Lebanese army had already maintained a presence in the days preceding the start of the pilot, and the forces conducted patrols and preparations before assuming full control of the villages (*al-Akhbar*, July 21, 2026).

► On July 24, the Lebanese army began allowing groups of residents from Zawtar al-Gharbiya to enter the town to inspect their homes, although permanent return was not yet allowed and entry was limited to a small number of vehicles at a time under military escort. Soldiers inspected the houses before allowing the owners to enter and escorted the residents out at the end of the visit. The restrictions were explained as necessary to complete the clearance of mines, unexploded ordnance and rubble (Al Jazeera and *al-Quds al-Arabi*,

July 24-25, 2026). According to sources on the ground, large parts of the town were destroyed, residents were prevented from returning to their homes and the main effort was focused on mine clearance, reopening roads and assessing the damage (Associated Press and Al Jazeera, July 22, 2026).

Local residents with Lebanese army soldiers at the entrance to Zawtar al-Gharbiya (al-Nahar, July 24, 2026)

► Reportedly, the Lebanese army could be authorized to conduct house searches in the south, which raised concerns among Hezbollah-affiliated figures that the pilot areas would serve as a precedent for dismantling the organization's infrastructure. The Lebanese attorney general denied issuing a blanket instruction, but the very appearance of the issue in public discourse illustrated the political and sectarian sensitivity surrounding Lebanese army operations against Hezbollah's weapons inside the villages (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, July 24, 2026).

The Direct Negotiations

► Lebanese sources reported that the next round of Lebanese-Israeli talks mediated by the United States would take place in Italy on August 4, 2026. Reportedly, they would focus on the continued activation of the framework agreement, expanding the pilot areas, Israel's continued withdrawal and the further deployment of the Lebanese army (Reuters, July 22, 2026).

The Lebanese Government

► President Aoun continued to describe the framework agreement as a combination of an Israeli withdrawal, the deployment of the Lebanese army and the reconstruction of the "affected areas." Meeting with the EU ambassadors to Lebanon, he requested assistance in preventing efforts to undermine the agreement and in ensuring reconstruction through state institutions, with particular emphasis on the Shi'ite population in the south (Naharnet, July 24, 2026).

► One day after the Lebanese army entered Zawtar al-Gharbiya, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam visited the town. He said the army's deployment was the first stage in implementing the agreement and linked it directly to the return of residents and reconstruction. His office announced coordination among the council for the south, the relief commission and the disaster management unit to reopen roads, clear rubble, restore services and provide temporary housing solutions (Agence France-Presse, July 22, 2026; office of the Lebanese prime minister, July 23, 2026).

Lebanese Prime Minister Salam during his visit to Zawtar al-Gharbiya (office of the Lebanese prime minister, July 22, 2026)

Opposition to the Agreement

► Hezbollah continued to reject the framework agreement and any discussion of disarmament as long as Israel maintained control of Lebanese territory and continued operating in the south. The organization criticized Aoun's visit to the United States and rejected the position of the government and supporters of the agreement, who praised the beginning of the activation of the pilot areas, claiming it did not represent progress toward ending the Israeli occupation.

- Hezbollah's faction in the Lebanese Parliament claimed Israel had not actually withdrawn from any occupied territory and the Lebanese army had merely expanded their deployment in an area where they had already been present. The faction pointed to Israeli fire targeting Lebanese army units as proof that Israel continued to control their movements even within the pilot area (Loyalty to the Resistance parliamentary faction, July 23, 2026).
- Ali Fayyad, a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, criticized the results of Aoun's visit to Washington and the political contacts surrounding the activation of the framework agreement. He called on the president and the government to identify a single practical achievement which had been secured

through the negotiations so far and argued that Israel continued its military operations in south Lebanon, enjoyed operational freedom of action and had failed to fulfill its commitment to a complete withdrawal from Lebanese territory. He said Hezbollah's principles [*sic*] were not subject to negotiation: the completion of the IDF's withdrawal from all Lebanese territory, a full ceasefire and the end of Israel's freedom of military action (al-'Ahed, July 26, 2026).

◆Hassan Ezzeddine, also a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, claimed there were only two possible explanations for Aoun's visit to the United States: either it had ended without any tangible achievements or understandings had been reached that the government refused to disclose to the public. He claimed that if information was indeed being concealed, it represented a deal which did not serve Lebanon's interests but was based on a "book of conditions" which did not guarantee the fulfillment of Lebanon's national demands, especially an end to Israeli attacks and the IDF's withdrawal from Lebanese territory. He claimed the contacts held in Washington and Rome reflected a broad "political-security process" to advance Israel's interests and legitimize the continuation of its freedom of action in Lebanon (Lebanon Files, July 26, 2026).

◆Hassan Fadlallah, also a member of the Hezbollah faction in the Lebanese Parliament, accused the Lebanese government of creating an "internal confrontation" over the issue of weapons. He claimed the Lebanese authorities were exerting pressure on several fronts to provoke internal conflict, but said Hezbollah did not want an internal Lebanese confrontation and was doing nothing which could lead to "domestic escalation." He warned the country's leadership against continuing measures which "could push the people toward confrontation," adding that no political actor in Lebanon would benefit from an internal conflict (al-'Ahed, July 23, 2026).

► Despite Hezbollah's criticism, its close ally, Nabih Berri, speaker of the Lebanese Parliament and leader of the Amal movement, was cautious regarding the framework agreement. He did not reject its outright but said the success of President Aoun's visit to Washington should be measured by the stabilization of the ceasefire and the continuation of the IDF's withdrawal from south Lebanon, rather than by declarations or ceremonies. He claimed the withdrawal from Zawtar al-Gharbiya was too limited to be considered a significant achievement in light of Israel's continued military activity in the south (*al-Sharq*

al-Awsat, July 22-23, 2026). He said he had not abandoned his principles despite his recent positions and remained opposed to direct [Israel-Lebanon] negotiations and to the framework agreement. Nevertheless, the objective was to achieve a ceasefire, a complete Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory and the return of residents to the villages of south Lebanon. Berri noted the importance of regional and international guarantees from Saudi Arabia, the United States and Iran to preserve Lebanon's stability (*al-Akhbar*, July 27, 2026).

► The daily Hezbollah-affiliated *al-Akhbar* said the activation of the framework agreement in Zawtar al-Gharbiya shattered "the victory narrative" President Aoun and Prime Minister Salam had attempted to create following the meeting in Washington. The paper claimed the situation on the ground, including only a limited Israeli withdrawal, the absence of binding American commitments and the continued IDF activity in the south, including shooting near Lebanese army units, demonstrated the arrangement's "structural weakness." According to newspaper, while Lebanon had to meet its commitments, Israel retained freedom of action and the ability to determine the limits of the Lebanese army's movements. The paper also mocked the "competition" between the president and the prime minister over claiming credit for the "achievement," arguing that the village and its residents had become a tool for creating a political image, while the genuine issues, such as the continued Israeli presence and activity in the south, remained unresolved (*al-Akhbar*, July 22-23, 2026).

► Articles published in *al-Akhbar* also represented Hezbollah's principal challenge not merely as the issue of disarmament, but as part of a broader campaign whose objective was to isolate the organization from its strategic environment. According to the paper, the framework agreement, the objectives of the expanded deployment of the Lebanese army in the south, tighter control along the Syrian border and American involvement were to gradually reduce the Hezbollah's military and logistical freedom of action and alter the balance of power in Lebanon (*al-Akhbar*, July 23-24, 2026). The paper also noted the gap between the scope of the Lebanese army's responsibilities along with its deployment in the south, i.e., expanding its control of the border with Syria, combating smuggling and terrorist organizations and maintaining internal stability, and its operational and logistical capabilities. It warned that expanding the army's role under the arrangement could place it at the center of the political confrontation over the future of Hezbollah's weapons (*al-Akhbar*, July 23-25, 2026).

Support for the Agreement

► Samir Geagea, chairman of the Lebanese Forces Party, called for continuing along the Washington path down to the last detail, arguing that full implementation of the framework agreement would make stability possible once the Lebanese army became the country's only armed force and the government became the sole authority responsible for declaring war and peace (*al-Nashra*, July 21, 2026).

► Government-supporting media outlets reported Salam's visit to Zawtar al-Gharbiya as a direct message to Hezbollah. The daily *Nidaa al-Watan* described his presence in the south as proof that the political track with Washington was capable of restoring territory and enabling the return of residents more effectively than Hezbollah's "war of support" (*Nidaa al-Watan*, July 23, 2026). The paper also argued that Hezbollah's responses to the framework agreement had remained largely at the declaratory level, while the state continued to advance the agreement on the ground. Hezbollah, it wrote, was now finding it difficult to disrupt the political process, in part because of the damage it had sustained during the war, regional changes and the international backing received by President Joseph Aoun and the government (*Nidaa al-Watan*, July 24-25, 2026).

Security in South Lebanon

► Hezbollah-affiliated media outlets continued to accuse the IDF of "ceasefire violations" in south Lebanon. They alleged that airstrikes had been carried out near Kafr Reman and Nabatieh al-Fawqa, explosions had occurred in a number of towns and villages, including Haddatha, Kafr Tebnit, Kounine, Markaba and Majdal Zoun, artillery fire had targeted various areas, including the Ali al-Taher Ridge, flares had been fired and search operations had been conducted. It was also reported that an Israeli UAV hit a vehicle belonging to the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Organization, wounding two (Hezbollah in the Field Telegram channel, July 20-27, 2026).

► In contrast, Hezbollah itself remained silent regarding claims of responsibility for attacks on IDF forces, a policy it has employed since June 20, 2026 (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, July 20-27, 2026). However, IDF forces reportedly detected and shot down a Hezbollah intelligence-gathering UAV near the Ali al-Taher Ridge (IDF Radio, July 26, 2026).

Challenges for Hezbollah

Hezbollah-Iran Relations

► The office of Iran's leader published a letter from Mojtaba Khamenei to Hezbollah's secretary general, the organization's senior leadership and its operatives in response to an earlier letter they had sent expressing their loyalty to his leadership. He emphasized that Iran's strategic policy was to protect the "oppressed and capable mujahideen," while preserving Lebanese sovereignty and completely ending "Zionist aggression," without conditions or restrictions, in accordance with the memorandum of understanding with the United States. Khamenei praised Hezbollah's shaheeds and wounded fighters, including its previous secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, and the organization's earlier leaders, who had transformed the "seeds of the Islamic 'resistance' into a tree" (al-Manar, July 26, 2026).

► Senior Hezbollah figure Nawaf al-Moussawi, responsible for the organization's resources and borders portfolio, said the war against Israel had not yet ended and any Israeli attack on Iran would lead to Hezbollah's "intervention." He warned against continued Israeli "violations," adding that the organization's operatives were monitoring IDF activity in south Lebanon while awaiting orders (al-Haqiqa website and *Times of Lebanon*, July 25, 2026). In response, the opposition daily *Nidaa al-Watan* warned against renewed Hezbollah involvement in the confrontation between the United States and Iran, arguing that such a move would expose Lebanon to an extensive Israeli response (*Nidaa al-Watan*, July 21, 2026).

► Several sources stated that the Iranian leadership was disappointed with Hezbollah's performance during the most recent round of hostilities because of the gap between Iran's long-term investment in the organization and its battlefield achievements. Iran reportedly believed the damage to Hezbollah's military infrastructure and communications systems had significantly reduced its ability to sustain a prolonged campaign. Iran was reportedly seeking to increase its control over Hezbollah by expanding the involvement of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps liaison officers in the organization's reconstruction, military buildup and decision-making. It was also claimed that the status of Hezbollah's civilian leadership had declined, while key military and political decisions were being made by figures directly connected to Tehran (Lebanon Debate, July 24, 2026).

► Mahmoud Qamati, the deputy chairman of Hezbollah's political council, criticized the Lebanese government for denying visas to Iranian citizens and Iranian diplomats, prohibiting Iranian aircraft from landing in Beirut and expelling the Iranian ambassador from

Lebanon. He claimed Hezbollah was exercising restraint in an effort to find a solution, but threatened that the organization could also prevent aircraft from landing in Beirut and expel all foreign ambassadors from the country. He called for repairing bilateral relations and urged the Lebanese general security directorate to intervene (Lebanon Debate, July 20, 2026). Sources in the Lebanese foreign ministry rejected Qamati's remarks and said that the authorities would continue to implement sovereign and security decisions (*Asharq al-Awsat*, July 22, 2026).

Syria

► Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa noted that Hezbollah had cooperated with Bashar al-Assad's regime against the Syrian people and had been responsible for the displacement of millions of Syrians and the deaths of tens of thousands of people. However, he said Syria did not intend to intervene militarily in Lebanon despite remarks by the United States president suggesting that Syrian security forces could participate in Hezbollah's disarmament. He warned that chaos in Lebanon would directly affect Syria and said Syria was discussing solutions with the Lebanese government to help achieve stability, although he added that the solutions would not necessarily be related to security. He said the regional experience of the past four decades had shown that weapons held outside the framework of the state led to disastrous consequences. Therefore, the Syrian government supported the principle of concentrating security authority in the hands of the Lebanese state, including a monopoly over the possession of weapons and decisions concerning war and peace (Al Jazeera, July 26, 2026).

► The daily Hezbollah-affiliated *al-Akhbar* reported that security ties between Lebanon and Syria were growing stronger under pressure and encouragement from Arab states and international actors seeking to establish permanent coordination mechanisms between Beirut and Damascus. Reportedly, the coordination deals with preventing smuggling, regulating illegal border crossings and exchanging information on the movements of jihadist terrorist organizations, particularly ISIS. According to the paper, the deployment of Syrian border guard forces along much of the border did not necessarily indicate an intention to invade Lebanon, as the new Syrian army faced shortages of trained personnel, equipment and financial resources and was therefore currently incapable of conducting a complex military campaign beyond Syrian borders (*al-Akhbar*, July 23, 2026).

Combatting Hezbollah's Finances

► Lebanese security sources stated that in recent months the Lebanese government had significantly reduced Hezbollah's presence at the country's land, sea and air border crossings. According to the report, the installation of new scanning systems at the Port of Beirut, Beirut International Airport and the Masnaa border crossing on the Lebanon-Syria border, along with tighter border controls and the replacement of officials suspected of cooperating with Hezbollah, resulted in a marked decline in the smuggling of weapons, cash, gold and drugs for the organization. It was further claimed that prohibiting Iranian aircraft from landing in Beirut had also contributed to reducing the transfer of cash and other resources to Hezbollah (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 27, 2026).

UNIFIL

► UNIFIL announced that it was expanding its activities in south Lebanon by increasing patrols, observation operations and activities to secure transportation routes. UNIFIL spokesperson Candice Ardell added that the force continued to monitor developments on the ground, submit reports, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to residents returning to the south and enable the safe movement of humanitarian aid workers (IMLebanon, July 21, 2026).

The Situation in South Lebanon

► The Hezbollah affiliated daily *al-Akhbar* claimed that in practice reconstruction was being carried out largely by local authorities and residents, while the state's presence remained limited. Reporting on Kafr Reman, the paper wrote that the municipality and residents had begun clearing rubble, repairing water pipelines and reopening roads. It noted that approximately 1,100 homes in the village had been damaged, but government assistance still did not match the scale of the destruction. The paper represented the situation as evidence of the gap between the government's declarations about restoring the state's presence in the south and its actual ability to finance and manage large-scale reconstruction (*al-Akhbar*, July 25, 2026).

► It also claimed that the issue of land ownership and property boundaries between plots in the villages of south Lebanon was becoming a major postwar "challenge." Because of the loss of documents, the destruction of boundary markers and damage to property records, disputes were expected to arise among families and landowners over the location of property boundaries and the size of each parcel before the war. The article warned that

without prompt state intervention and an orderly legal and engineering mechanism, a war over boundaries and ownership could delay reconstruction and further deepen social tensions within the communities of south Lebanon (*al-Akhbar*, July 23, 2026).

► UNESCO placed the Old City of Tyre and five fortresses in south Lebanon (Jabal Amel) on the list of world heritage sites in danger because of direct damage and the continuing threats from the fighting (Al Jazeera, July 25, 2026).