



By: TA | AP Insight

Is Lebanon's invitation to Israel for direct talks too late?



With airstrikes rocking Beirut and Israeli troops advancing against Hezbollah, Lebanon's government has broken a taboo by proposing the first direct talks with Israel in decades.

But Lebanese officials say they want the fighting to end first – and it might be too late for that.

Hezbollah's decision to enter the wider Iran war by firing rockets at Israel has led to the heavy Israeli bombardment of southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs, killing some 880 Lebanese and driving over **a million people** from their homes.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah views the latest war as an existential struggle, and Israel is threatening a wider ground invasion, the seizure of territory and the destruction of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure.

The United States, which has **mediated** during past flare-ups, has so far shown no interest in doing so this time around.

Last week, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun offered to hold direct negotiations with Israel for the first time since the 1982 Israeli invasion during Lebanon's civil war.

Aoun also asked for a boost in funding for Lebanese troops and reaffirmed his commitment to disarm Hezbollah, a longstanding Israeli and U.S. demand.

But Lebanon wants the fighting to end before any talks with Israel, according to three Lebanese diplomatic and government officials familiar with the matter. They spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the press.

Israeli officials did not respond to requests for comment about the offer of talks. But Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, during a visit to an Israeli town hit by an Iranian missile, denied any talks were planned.

A new approach to a weakened Hezbollah

The agreement that ended Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war called for the disarmament of all armed groups, but Hezbollah alone kept its weapons, saying they were needed to protect Lebanon from Israel, which occupied the country's south until 2000.

Successive Lebanese governments, even those dominated by Hezbollah's political rivals, refused to directly confront the group, which was widely seen as more powerful than Lebanon's armed forces.

There were fears that any attempt to disarm Hezbollah by force could rekindle the civil war.

That calculus started to change in 2024, when Israel killed most of **Hezbollah's top leaders** and pummeled its armed wing, potentially opening the door for Lebanese authorities to exert greater control.

When Hezbollah launched a volley of missiles at Israel days after the surprise U.S.-Israeli bombing of Iran, the Lebanese government condemned the militant group

Aoun, a former army commander, and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, who both took office in early 2025, pledged to disarm Hezbollah, a position with wide support among **Lebanon's war-weary population**.

In the months leading up to the war, the government deployed troops across large parts of southern Lebanon and said it dismantled over 500 Hezbollah warehouses and military positions. But it did not confront the group directly.

When Hezbollah launched a volley of missiles at Israel days after the surprise U.S.-Israeli bombing of Iran, the Lebanese government condemned the militant group, outlawed its activities, and arrested several militants it accused of illegal possession of weapons.

But by then the country had been plunged into yet another war.

Hezbollah remains defiant

Hezbollah, which has launched waves of missiles and drones into northern Israel since that initial attack, still portrays itself as Lebanon's only viable defense.

It accuses Israel of violating a 2024 U.S.-brokered ceasefire agreement because it continued to launch regular airstrikes, which often killed civilians, and refused to withdraw from five strategic points along the border.

Hezbollah also likely feels obligated to support Iran, its main sponsor, at a moment of peril.

Israel says Hezbollah is in violation of past agreements requiring it to disarm and that the airstrikes were aimed at preventing attacks.

It has long accused Lebanese authorities of failing to disarm the group and warned that it would do so itself, at potentially great cost to Lebanon.



The Lebanese government will pay an increasing price in infrastructure damage and territorial loss until the commitment to disarm Hezbollah is fulfilled - Israel Katz

Last week, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said the Lebanese government “will pay an increasing price in infrastructure damage and territorial loss until the commitment to disarm Hezbollah is fulfilled.”

Hezbollah officials have denounced the offer of direct talks with Israel and blame the government for failing to end the Israeli strikes

or the occupation of the border areas.

Mahmoud Qamati, a senior official in Hezbollah's political bureau, said the offer of talks with Israel was a “concession and a big mistake,” in light of “the ongoing occupation and aggression.”

“This move would be stabbing the resistance in the back. The state cannot make any promises without the resistance's approval,” he told the Al Jazeera network.

Entreaties fall upon deaf ears in Washington

During past blow-ups, Lebanon would often turn to the United States, which has leverage over Israel and is a major donor to the Lebanese military.

But Washington appears to be preoccupied with the wider war and its impact on the global economy.

“There is no senior official in the White House focusing on Lebanon,” said Randa Slim, director of the Middle East Program at the Washington-based Stimson Center.

Thomas Barrack, who serves as the White House envoy to Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, dismissed Lebanon as a “failed state” last year.

Slim said the offer of talks was unlikely to gain traction or head off an Israeli invasion.

Hezbollah's actions have now set back for the time being any resolution of this war - Ed Gabriel

Israel and the U.S had expected more decisive action from Lebanon's army after the last war, despite its limited capabilities and financial struggles, and the risks of confronting Hezbollah directly. They may not be inclined to give it another chance.

“They had been very clear with the Lebanese

on how important it was to control Hezbollah from doing anything offensively,” said Ed Gabriel, president of the American Task Force on Lebanon, a nonprofit that aims to build stronger U.S.-Lebanon ties.

“Hezbollah’s actions have now set back for the time being any resolution of this war and created a lack of confidence by U.S. officials that the (Lebanese armed forces) can control and disarm Hezbollah,” he said.

Israeli troops are meanwhile advancing deeper into southern Lebanon ahead of an expected wider ground invasion.

The Israeli military has struck and destroyed bridges and key roads, and issued evacuation warnings for an area stretching dozens of miles (kilometers) north of the border.

The Lebanese government, in the grip of a severe, yearslong **financial crisis**, is scrambling to provide shelter and aid for almost one million people displaced.

It is also calling on the international community to press Israel to spare key infrastructure, like Beirut's airport and seaport, according to one of the Lebanese officials.

Aoun, once confident he could disarm Hezbollah with minimal confrontation, continues with his flurry of diplomatic calls from the hilltop presidential palace.

Drones circle overhead, airstrikes echo in the distance, and plumes of smoke rise to the south.