

**Resistance or Aggression?
The Battle of Narratives Behind the Israel-Hezbollah
Conflict in Lebanon**

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Introduction

For Lebanon, the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah is not simply a dispute taking place along its southern border (Byman et al., 2024). Lebanon has repeatedly become the battlefield where Israeli military strategy, Hezbollah's resistance role, regional tensions, and internal Lebanese political divisions collide. The consequences are felt most directly by communities in the south, which have experienced occupation, war, displacement, destruction, and the uncertainty of future escalation. The conflict is understood differently by the people and actors involved (Kobeissi, 2026). Hezbollah presents itself as a resistance movement that emerged during Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon and continues to serve as a force of deterrence against Israeli attacks. Israel views Hezbollah as a major security threat to its northern communities and presents its military actions as necessary for protection and deterrence. Within Lebanon, the conflict also raises difficult questions about sovereignty, especially whether a non-state armed group should have the authority to make decisions that can place the entire country at risk. For civilians on both sides of the border, the conflict is often experienced through fear, displacement, loss, and uncertainty rather than through political or military language (Saouli, 2024). This study examines the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in Lebanon through the Change-Oriented Conflict Analysis framework. It describes the conflict and its history, identify the major stakeholders, examines the roots of the conflict, and consider the cultural and ethical issues that shape it. Particular attention is given to competing narratives of resistance, security, sovereignty, and civilian suffering, since these narratives influence how violence is understood, who is considered legitimate, and what solutions people are willing to accept. The paper examines the conflict's outcomes, aspects of intractability, and potential interventions that could reduce civilian harm, strengthen conflict-management efforts, and support long-term de-escalation.

Sources and Narrative-Analysis Method

This case study uses a qualitative, comparative narrative analysis within the Change-Oriented Conflict Analysis framework. It draws on peer-reviewed scholarship and books for the historical and political background; reports from the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, the Congressional Research Service, and the Council on Foreign Relations for institutional and humanitarian perspectives; and a purposive sample of public statements and news coverage for the contemporary narratives. The contemporary sample is restricted primarily to the period from October 2023 through the November 2024 cessation-of-hostilities arrangement, with a supplementary review of developments through mid-2026 to account for the conflict's continued evolution. Historical sources explain earlier developments but are not treated as part of the contemporary narrative sample.

The sample represents three positions central to the conflict: Hezbollah's resistance and Palestinian-solidarity narrative, Israel's security and deterrence narrative, and the Lebanese state-sovereignty and civilian-protection narrative reflected in United Nations diplomacy. Hezbollah's position is examined through reporting and analysis of Hassan Nasrallah's November 3, 2023 address; Israel's position is examined through public statements issued by the Israel Defense Forces in December 2023 and October 2024; and the sovereignty-oriented position is examined through Resolution 1701 and the November 2024 cessation-of-hostilities commitments (Israel Defense Forces, 2023, 2024; United Nations Security Council, 2006, 2024; United States Institute of Peace, 2023). These sources are not assumed to represent every Lebanese, Hezbollah-supporting, or Israeli viewpoint. Instead, they provide a bounded sample through which influential public framings can be compared.

Each source is examined using the same questions: How is the conflict described? Which historical events are emphasized or omitted? Who is presented as the aggressor, victim, protector, or legitimate authority? How is military action justified? Whose civilian suffering is emphasized? What outcome is presented as necessary or legitimate? Particular attention is given to recurring terms such as “resistance,” “support front,” “self-defense,” “deterrence,” “terrorism,” “sovereignty,” and “civilian protection.” This method examines not only what actors claim, but also how their framing assigns responsibility and limits the solutions they are willing to consider. The approach has limitations. Official statements are strategic communications intended to justify policies and influence audiences, while news and institutional sources differ in terminology, access, and political perspective. Because no direct interviews were conducted, the paper does not claim to capture the full range of civilian opinion in southern Lebanon or northern Israel.

Description of the Conflict

The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah is connected to Lebanon's long involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Moreover, it is related to the history of Israeli military action and occupation in southern Lebanon, and Lebanon's weak and divided state institutions. After the Palestinian Nakba in 1948, Lebanon received large numbers of Palestinian refugees (Feldman, 2022). Many remained in refugee camps under difficult legal and economic conditions, while the Palestinian cause became an important political issue in Lebanon and across the Arab world. By the late 1960s, Palestinian armed groups, including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), had become increasingly active in Lebanon (Deeb et al., 2024). The 1969 Cairo Agreement formalized aspects of the relationship between the Lebanese state and Palestinian armed organizations. It recognized certain rights for Palestinians living in Lebanon and regulated

Palestinian armed activity, including operations against Israel from parts of southern Lebanon (Deeb et al., 2024). Many Lebanese groups, particularly leftist, Arab nationalist, and Muslim political movements supported the Palestinian cause and viewed the PLO's presence as part of a broader regional responsibility toward Palestinians. Other Lebanese groups feared that armed organizations operating outside state authority would weaken Lebanese sovereignty and expose the country to retaliation and wider conflict. After Black September in Jordan in 1970, much of the PLO's leadership and armed presence moved to Lebanon, increasing both its influence and the tensions surrounding its role (Deeb et al., 2024). Southern Lebanon was deeply affected by these developments. For decades, the region received limited state investment and protection compared with other parts of Lebanon (Manfredi Firmian, 2024). It also experienced repeated Israeli raids, invasions, occupation, displacement, and damage to homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978 and again on a much larger scale in 1982. Although the 1982 invasion led to the PLO leadership leaving Beirut, Israel maintained a security zone in parts of southern Lebanon until 2000. These experiences created conditions in which armed resistance gained support among some southern Lebanese communities, while also contributing to Lebanon's continuing struggle over who should provide security and control the use of force. Hezbollah emerged during the 1980s in this environment. Its rise was shaped by Israeli occupation, the political and economic marginalization of many Shi'a communities, and Iranian support after the 1979 Iranian Revolution (Bagheri et al., 2022). Iran provided Hezbollah with financial, military, and political backing, while Hezbollah developed a local base through armed resistance, social services, reconstruction, and political participation. Over time, Hezbollah became both a major Lebanese political party and one of the country's most powerful armed actors. Supporters view Hezbollah as an important deterrent against Israel and as an institution

that provided protection and services when the state was absent. Critics argue that its independent weapons and decision-making authority undermine Lebanese sovereignty, weaken state institutions, and can draw Lebanon into conflicts that many citizens did not choose (Zafar & Akhtar, 2025). Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 ended the occupation but did not end the conflict. Border disputes, including disagreement over areas such as Shebaa Farms, Hezbollah's weapons, Israel's security concerns, and the unresolved question of who has authority over decisions of war and peace remained. In 2006, Hezbollah carried out a cross-border operation that resulted in the capture of two Israeli soldiers. Israel responded with a large-scale military campaign in Lebanon, while Hezbollah launched rockets into northern Israel. The 34-day war caused widespread destruction, civilian casualties, and displacement, especially in Lebanon (Hamieh & Mac Ginty, 2010). United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 ended the war by calling for a cessation of hostilities, a stronger UNIFIL presence, and deployment of the Lebanese Army in southern Lebanon. However, it did not resolve the core political and security issues behind the conflict.

After October 2023, cross-border fighting resumed as Hezbollah linked its attacks on Israel to the war in Gaza and support for Palestinians. Israel responded with escalating strikes in southern Lebanon and other parts of the country, again displacing communities and damaging border areas. In September 2024, Israel dramatically escalated its campaign, killing much of Hezbollah's senior military leadership over the course of several weeks and, on September 27, assassinating Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in an airstrike on Hezbollah's underground headquarters in Beirut (Congressional Research Service, 2024). Naim Qassem was subsequently named Hezbollah's new secretary-general. A US-brokered cessation-of-hostilities agreement in November 2024 ended the largest-scale fighting, but Israel continued regular airstrikes that it

attributed to Hezbollah violations of the agreement, while Israel alleged that Hezbollah was rebuilding its military capacity. (Kobeissi, 2026). The conflict escalated dramatically again on March 2, 2026. After the outbreak of a wider war between Israel and Iran in late February 2026, in which Israel and the United States struck Iranian leadership and nuclear and military infrastructure, Hezbollah resumed rocket and drone attacks on northern Israel in solidarity with Iran. Israel responded with a large-scale invasion of southern Lebanon. Over the following months, the renewed war killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon, displaced over one million residents, and left Israeli forces occupying roughly a fifth of Lebanese territory, including areas north of the Blue Line (Al Jazeera, 2026). A series of ceasefires brokered by the United States in April, May, and June 2026 repeatedly broke down or were only partially observed, as both sides accused each other of violations. In June 2026, Israel and Lebanon signed a framework agreement in Washington that called for a phased Israeli withdrawal tied to the verified disarmament of Hezbollah, but Hezbollah, which was not a party to the talks, publicly rejected the agreement as a “surrender of sovereignty” and vowed to continue fighting while Israeli forces remained in Lebanon (Al Jazeera, 2026). Today, the conflict remains shaped by unresolved disputes over security, resistance, sovereignty, and civilian protection, and, as of this writing, it continues without a durable political resolution (Harutyunyan, 2026).

Stakeholders Involved

Using the Change-Oriented Conflict Analysis framework, this section identifies the actors affected by or able to influence the conflict, along with their interests, sources of power, and primary concerns. The Israel-Hezbollah conflict involves governments, armed groups, international organizations, and communities whose lives, identities, and security are directly affected by the conflict.

Hezbollah is one of the main actors in the conflict. It is a Lebanese political party, social organization, and armed group that emerged during Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon. Today, it participates in Lebanon's political system while maintaining an independent military force separate from the Lebanese Army (Thomas & Zanotti, 2024). Hezbollah describes its weapons as necessary to deter Israeli attacks and defend Lebanon. Critics argue that its military power allows it to make decisions about escalation without state approval, placing the country at risk of war.

Israel is the other main military actor. Israel views Hezbollah as a major threat because Hezbollah has fighters, weapons, and infrastructure near Israel's northern border. Israeli officials describe military action in Lebanon as necessary to protect northern Israeli communities from rockets, cross-border attacks, and other threats. Many Lebanese people, especially in the South, associate Israeli military action with invasion, occupation, displacement, and destruction. These different experiences shape why the same event can be understood as self-defense by one side and aggression by the other.

The Lebanese state is a central stakeholder because the conflict takes place on Lebanese territory. The Lebanese government, Lebanese Armed Forces, and public institutions are officially responsible for protecting civilians, defending the country's borders, and making decisions about war and peace. However, political divisions, economic crisis, and limited state capacity have made it difficult for the government to fully control military decisions made from Lebanese territory. This has created an ongoing debate over whether the Lebanese state alone should have the authority to decide when Lebanon enters a conflict.

This issue is especially important in southern Lebanon, between the Blue Line and the Litani River. The Blue Line is a United Nations-monitored line created in 2000 to confirm Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon. It is not a final agreed international border, but it is used to monitor violations and reduce the risk of conflict. After the 2006 war, Resolution 1701 called for the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River to be secured by the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL. The resolution was meant to reduce the risk of another war, but disagreements over Hezbollah's military presence and Israel's security concerns have continued.

Lebanese communities that support or sympathize with Hezbollah are also important stakeholders. Their support is shaped by memories of occupation, displacement, and the belief that Hezbollah provided protection when the Lebanese state could not. Others support Hezbollah because of political identity, religious affiliation, family history, or solidarity with the Palestinian cause. However, Hezbollah's support base is not uniform. Even among people who support resistance, there may be disagreement about the costs of escalation, destruction, reconstruction, and whether Hezbollah's armed role continues to protect or endanger their communities.

Lebanese communities and political actors who oppose Hezbollah's armed role are another major stakeholder group. Many oppose Israeli attacks and support Palestinian rights while also believing that Hezbollah's independent weapons weaken Lebanese sovereignty. Their concern is that no political party or armed group should have the authority to make decisions that could bring the entire country into war. Criticism of Hezbollah, therefore, should not automatically be understood as support for Israel or indifference toward Palestinian suffering.

Lebanese civilians, particularly those living in southern Lebanon, are among the most directly affected stakeholders. Communities near the border have experienced repeated displacement,

damaged homes, loss of income, disrupted education, and long-term fear. Their perspectives are often more complicated than political narratives suggest. Some strongly support Hezbollah, some oppose it, and many feel both fear of Israeli attacks and frustration with the Lebanese state's inability to protect them.

Lebanese expatriates and diaspora communities are also relevant. Lebanese people abroad may not experience bombing or displacement directly, but many remain connected through family, remittances, political activism, media, and villages of origin. Some emphasize Lebanese sovereignty and criticize Hezbollah's military role, while others focus on resistance, Palestinian solidarity, and opposition to Israeli military action.

A smaller but relevant group includes Lebanese people living in Israel, particularly former members of the South Lebanon Army and their families (Ruebner, 2000). The South Lebanon Army was a Lebanese militia allied with Israel during the occupation of southern Lebanon. When Israel withdrew in 2000, many members and relatives entered Israel because they feared retaliation or could not safely remain in Lebanon. Their experiences involve exile, separation from relatives, accusations of collaboration, and difficult questions of identity and belonging.

Israeli civilians living in northern Israel are also direct stakeholders. During escalations, many have experienced rocket attacks, evacuation, interrupted schooling and work, and long periods of insecurity. Their fears influence Israeli public opinion and help explain why security and deterrence are powerful narratives within Israel.

Iran is a major regional stakeholder because it has supported Hezbollah since the group's early years. Iran provides political, financial, and military assistance to Hezbollah and views the group as an important partner in its regional strategy against Israel and the United States (Bagheri et al.,

2022). Iran's role is controversial inside Lebanon because many Lebanese believe it connects the country's security to wider regional tensions that may not always reflect Lebanese interests.

Finally, the United Nations, UNIFIL, the United States, and other regional and international actors influence the conflict through peacekeeping, diplomacy, military aid, sanctions, and ceasefire negotiations. UNIFIL monitors the border and supports the implementation of Resolution 1701. The United States has influence because of its close relationship with Israel, support for the Lebanese Armed Forces, and involvement in diplomatic efforts to prevent wider war.

Roots of the Conflict

The Israel-Hezbollah conflict has deep historical roots that go beyond recent cross-border escalation. Lebanon became closely connected to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict after the arrival of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and the later presence of the PLO in Lebanon. Israeli invasions in 1978 and 1982, followed by the long occupation of parts of southern Lebanon, created lasting trauma, displacement, and insecurity for communities in the South. Hezbollah emerged during this period and gained legitimacy among many supporters by presenting itself as a resistance movement against occupation. Although Israel withdrew from most of southern Lebanon in 2000, the legacy of occupation, unresolved border disputes, and competing interpretations of what the withdrawal meant continued to shape the conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2026).

A second root of the conflict is the weakness of the Lebanese state. Southern Lebanon was historically marginalized and often received limited state investment, protection, and public services. In this context, Hezbollah developed not only as an armed group but also as a political and social organization that provided services, reconstruction, and support to many communities.

Supporters see this role as evidence that Hezbollah filled gaps left by the state. Critics argue that the group's independent military capacity has weakened state authority by allowing a non-state actor to influence decisions of war and peace (Vinci, 2008). This tension reflects a larger conflict within Lebanon over sovereignty, accountability, and who has the legitimate authority to use force.

Security concerns and power imbalance are also central. Israel views Hezbollah's weapons and military presence near its northern border as a serious threat to Israeli communities. Hezbollah argues that its weapons are necessary to deter Israeli attacks and prevent another occupation. The two sides also do not have equal military capabilities. Israel has a conventional military with advanced air power, intelligence capabilities, and support from major allies, while Hezbollah relies on missiles, guerrilla tactics, and regional alliances. This imbalance contributes to cycles of deterrence and retaliation, in which each side claims that its actions are defensive while the other views them as aggression.

Regional alliances make the conflict more difficult to separate from wider Middle Eastern tensions. Iran has provided Hezbollah with long-term political, financial, and military support, while the United States has remained Israel's most important international ally. The conflict is also connected to developments in Palestine, Gaza, Syria, and the broader confrontation between Iran, Israel, and the United States (Thomas & Zanotti, 2024). As a result, events outside Lebanon can quickly affect the border and place Lebanese communities at risk. The 2026 escalation illustrated this dynamic directly: fighting between Israel and Hezbollah resumed not because of a new dispute inside Lebanon, but because of the outbreak of a separate war between Israel and Iran, underscoring how little control Lebanon has over the regional forces that repeatedly draw it into conflict.

Finally, identity, collective memory, and competing narratives continue to sustain the conflict. For many southern Lebanese families, memories of occupation, displacement, and loss shape the belief that resistance remains necessary. For many Israelis, memories of rocket attacks and insecurity near the northern border strengthen the belief that Hezbollah must be deterred or removed as a military threat. Within Lebanon, people also disagree about whether Hezbollah represents protection, resistance, or a challenge to national sovereignty. These narratives are tied to personal experience, political identity, and historical memory, which makes compromise more difficult.

Comparative Analysis of the Narratives

The three narratives do not merely offer different opinions about the same events; they begin the story at different points and assign the roles of aggressor, victim, and protector differently.

Hezbollah's contemporary framing begins with the war in Gaza and places the Lebanese front within a longer history of Palestinian dispossession and resistance to Israel. In his November 3, 2023 address, Hassan Nasrallah described Hezbollah as already participating in the conflict by engaging Israeli forces along the border and dividing Israel's military attention. He presented the Lebanese front as supportive of Gaza and treated the success of Palestinian resistance as beneficial to Lebanon and the wider region (United States Institute of Peace, 2023). This framing legitimizes Hezbollah's actions through solidarity, resistance, and deterrence. It also shifts attention away from whether the Lebanese state authorized the fighting and toward whether participation contributes to the larger Palestinian struggle.

The Israeli security narrative begins from a different event: Hezbollah's decision to open fire across the border after October 7, 2023. An Israeli military statement in December 2023 emphasized attacks on Israeli civilians and soldiers, the displacement of northern residents,

Hezbollah's relationship with Iran, and alleged violations of Resolution 1701. The statement characterized Israel's strikes as responses to Hezbollah's actions and argued that Hezbollah was pulling Lebanon into an unnecessary war (Israel Defense Forces, 2023). In October 2024, the Israeli military described the goal of its operations as pushing Hezbollah away from the border, reducing its capabilities, and removing the threat to northern residents (Israel Defense Forces, 2024). By beginning with Hezbollah's attacks rather than the history of occupation or the war in Gaza, this narrative presents Israel as the protector responding to an externally imposed threat. It foregrounds Israeli displacement and insecurity while giving less attention to the scale of harm experienced by Lebanese civilians.

The Lebanese sovereignty narrative changes the central question from which military actor is justified to who possesses legitimate authority to decide questions of war and peace. Resolution 1701 envisioned an area between the Blue Line and the Litani River free of armed personnel and weapons other than those of the Lebanese state and UNIFIL (United Nations Security Council, 2006). The November 2024 cessation-of-hostilities arrangement similarly committed the Lebanese government to preventing armed groups from conducting operations against Israel, while Israel agreed not to conduct offensive military operations against Lebanese targets (United Nations Security Council, 2024). This framing recognizes security concerns while locating legitimate authority in the Lebanese state. Its weakness is that formal state authority does not by itself resolve the distrust created by occupation, Israeli violations, institutional weakness, or the belief among Hezbollah supporters that the state has historically failed to protect the South. The 2026 framework agreement, negotiated between Israel and the Lebanese government without Hezbollah at the table, reflects this same sovereignty logic and has run into the same underlying

weakness: an agreement premised on state authority carries little practical weight over an armed actor that was excluded from making it.

The comparison reveals a major obstacle to conflict management. Hezbollah's narrative asks whether resistance and solidarity are necessary; Israel's asks how northern residents can be protected from Hezbollah; and the sovereignty narrative asks who has the legitimate authority to use force from Lebanese territory. Because each begins with a different problem, each also defines a different solution. A Gaza ceasefire and continued deterrence appear central within Hezbollah's framing; the removal of Hezbollah's military presence near the border appears central within Israel's; and state control together with implementation of Resolution 1701 appears central within the sovereignty framing. Each narrative recognizes genuine fears but selectively emphasizes history, responsibility, and civilian suffering. This selectivity helps sustain the conflict because concessions can be portrayed as abandoning resistance, accepting insecurity, or surrendering sovereignty.

Cultural Considerations

Cultural considerations are important in the Israel-Hezbollah conflict because people do not understand security, resistance, sovereignty, or loss in the same way. In southern Lebanon, memories of occupation, displacement, airstrikes, and loss shape how many people view Israel and the need for protection. For some communities, resistance is not only a political position but part of a collective memory of surviving occupation and repeated war. At the same time, these experiences do not create one uniform perspective. People in the South may support Hezbollah, criticize its role, or hold mixed views shaped by both fear of Israeli attacks and concern about the cost of continued escalation (Norton, 2018). The Palestinian cause is also a major cultural and political factor in Lebanon. Many Lebanese see Palestinian displacement and the ongoing

conflict in Gaza and the West Bank as connected to Lebanon's own history of war, occupation, and refuge. This sense of solidarity helps explain why Hezbollah frames its actions as part of a larger struggle rather than only a border dispute with Israel. However, Lebanese support for Palestinian rights does not always mean support for Hezbollah's military strategy. Many Lebanese separate solidarity with Palestinians from the question of whether Hezbollah should have the authority to make military decisions on behalf of the country (Cammett, 2014).

Religion and sectarian identity also influence the conflict, but they should not be treated as simple explanations for people's views. Hezbollah has deep roots in many Shi'a communities, particularly in southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs, where it has built political, social, and service networks. However, not all Shi'a Lebanese support Hezbollah, and Hezbollah's supporters are not limited to one religious group (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026). Likewise, opposition to Hezbollah exists across Lebanon's religious and political communities. The conflict is therefore shaped less by religion alone than by the way sectarian identity intersects with class, region, political affiliation, family experience, and trust in state institutions.

Language also plays an important role. Terms such as “resistance,” “terrorism,” “self-defense,” “aggression,” “martyrdom,” “deterrence,” and “collaboration” carry strong moral and political meanings. These words do more than describe events; they influence how people assign blame, recognize suffering, and decide who is legitimate. For example, describing a military action as resistance may emphasize occupation and protection, while describing the same action as provocation may emphasize escalation and civilian risk. These different labels can make dialogue difficult because they often reflect deeply held beliefs about history, identity, and justice.

Cultural differences also appear in the experiences of civilians on both sides of the border. Southern Lebanese communities may interpret security through memories of invasion and occupation, while northern Israeli communities may interpret security through fear of rockets, evacuation, and cross-border attacks. Lebanese diaspora communities may also experience the conflict differently because they are physically distant but remain connected through family, financial support, political activism, and media. These different experiences show why conflict-management efforts must recognize historical memory, identity, and the emotional impact of violence rather than focusing only on military arrangements.

Ethical Issues

The Israel-Hezbollah conflict raises serious ethical questions because civilians in both Lebanon and Israel often carry the greatest consequences of decisions made by political and military actors. During periods of escalation, families may be forced to leave their homes, lose access to work or education, and live with the fear of further violence. In Lebanon, repeated conflict has also damaged homes, infrastructure, farms, and local economies, particularly in southern communities. An ethical analysis of the conflict must therefore begin with civilian protection and the responsibility of all parties to minimize harm to people who are not directly involved in fighting.

A central ethical issue is accountability for military action. Both Israel and Hezbollah frame their actions as defensive, but the language of self-defense or resistance does not remove the responsibility to follow international humanitarian law. Military actors must distinguish between civilians and combatants, avoid disproportionate harm, and take precautions to protect civilian areas. This is especially difficult in a conflict where fighting takes place close to villages, towns,

and civilian infrastructure, but that difficulty does not remove the need for accountability when civilians are killed, displaced, or deprived of basic safety.

The conflict also raises ethical questions about deterrence and retaliation. Israel argues that military force is necessary to deter Hezbollah and protect communities in northern Israel.

Hezbollah argues that its weapons are necessary to deter Israeli attacks and defend Lebanon. Yet deterrence can create a cycle in which each side responds to perceived threats with actions that increase fear and insecurity for civilians. What one side describes as deterrence may be experienced by the other as collective punishment, escalation, or aggression.

Lebanese sovereignty is another important ethical issue. The Lebanese state is officially responsible for protecting its territory and making decisions about war and peace. However, Hezbollah's independent military capacity means that decisions with national consequences may be shaped by an actor outside the formal authority of the state. Critics argue that this weakens democratic accountability because Lebanese citizens do not all have equal influence over decisions that may place the country at risk. Supporters argue that Hezbollah's military role developed because the Lebanese state was unable to protect southern communities from occupation and attack. This tension shows that the ethical issue is not only who has weapons, but also what happens when people do not trust the state to provide security.

Finally, the conflict raises concerns about how civilian suffering is used in political narratives. Different actors may emphasize the suffering of their own communities while minimizing or ignoring the suffering of others. A more ethical approach to conflict analysis must recognize that civilian fear, displacement, and loss matter on all sides, while still examining the unequal power, responsibilities, and consequences involved in military action. Long-term conflict management

cannot depend only on ceasefires; it must also address civilian protection, accountability, and the legitimacy of decisions made in the name of security or resistance.

Outcomes of the Conflict and Aspects of Intractability

The Israel-Hezbollah conflict has produced long-term political, social, economic, and humanitarian consequences in Lebanon. In southern Lebanon, repeated escalation has led to displacement, destruction of homes and infrastructure, loss of agricultural land and livelihoods, disrupted education, and lasting psychological stress. Communities near the border often live with uncertainty about whether violence will resume, making it difficult to rebuild or plan for the future. The conflict also affects Lebanon beyond the South by increasing political tension, placing pressure on an already fragile economy, and reinforcing public fear that the country may again be drawn into a wider regional war.

The conflict has also deepened divisions within Lebanon. Some Lebanese see Hezbollah's armed role as necessary protection against Israeli attacks and as a continuation of resistance to occupation. Others believe that Hezbollah's military autonomy weakens the authority of the Lebanese state and places the country at risk without national consensus. These disagreements are connected to identity, regional experience, family history, and different levels of exposure to violence. As a result, the conflict affects how Lebanese people understand sovereignty, citizenship, national security, and responsibility.

The conflict can be considered intractable because its underlying issues have not been resolved despite wars, ceasefires, United Nations resolutions, and diplomatic efforts. The 2000 Israeli withdrawal and the 2006 ceasefire reduced some immediate forms of conflict, but they did not settle border disputes, Hezbollah's armed status, Israel's security concerns, or Lebanon's ability to

control decisions of war and peace. Each new escalation reinforces existing fears and narratives, making compromise more difficult.

The clearest evidence of this intractability emerged in 2026. Despite the November 2024 cessation-of-hostilities agreement, the underlying disputes over disarmament, sovereignty, and border security were never resolved: Hezbollah worked to rebuild its military capacity while Israel continued near-daily strikes that it said targeted continuing violations (Kobeissi, 2026). When war broke out between Israel and Iran in late February 2026, Hezbollah resumed attacks on northern Israel in solidarity with its patron, and Israel launched a large-scale invasion of southern Lebanon on March 2. Over the following months, the renewed fighting killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon, displaced over a million residents, and left Israeli forces occupying roughly a fifth of Lebanese territory (Al Jazeera, 2026). A succession of US-brokered ceasefires in April, May, and June 2026 repeatedly broke down or were only partially honored, and a June 2026 framework agreement linking an Israeli withdrawal to the verified disarmament of Hezbollah was publicly rejected by Hezbollah's leadership, which had been excluded from the negotiations (Al Jazeera, 2026). This pattern illustrates why the conflict resists conventional conflict-management tools: even a formal state-to-state agreement cannot bind a powerful non-state actor that was not party to it, and each ceasefire since 2023 has functioned as a pause in the fighting rather than a resolution of the dispute that caused it.

Another feature of intractability is the role of collective memory. For many southern Lebanese families, memories of occupation, displacement, and military attacks make the idea of disarmament or reliance on outside guarantees difficult to trust. For many northern Israeli communities, memories of rockets, evacuations, and cross-border attacks strengthen support for deterrence and military protection. The events of 2026 have deepened both sets of memories

rather than resolving them: southern Lebanese communities experienced the largest single wave of destruction and displacement since 2006, while northern Israeli communities again lived through renewed rocket and drone attacks. These experiences shape how each side interprets new events through decades of accumulated fear, loss, and insecurity.

The regional dimension also makes the conflict difficult to contain. Hezbollah's relationship with Iran, Israel's alliance with the United States, and the connection between the Lebanon border and developments in Palestine, Gaza, Syria, and Iran mean that decisions made outside Lebanon can quickly affect Lebanese communities. This makes local conflict management more difficult because a reduction in violence along the border may depend on wider regional developments that Lebanon itself cannot control. The 2026 war is an illustration of this dynamic: the immediate trigger for renewed fighting in Lebanon was not a dispute inside the country but the outbreak of a separate war between Israel and Iran, in which Hezbollah resumed attacks in declared support of Iran. Overall, the conflict remains intractable because it involves more than territory or military strategy. It is sustained by unresolved political questions, unequal power, weak state authority, regional alliances, competing security concerns, and narratives that make each side's position appear necessary or nonnegotiable. These factors help explain why ceasefires may reduce immediate violence but often fail to create lasting stability, and why, as of mid-2026, the conflict remains unresolved even after two additional cessation-of-hostilities agreements and a formal bilateral framework.

Potential Interventions

Because the Israel-Hezbollah conflict is rooted in unresolved security concerns, weak state authority, regional alliances, and competing narratives, no single intervention is likely to produce

a lasting solution. However, several steps could reduce civilian harm, prevent escalation, and create conditions for more sustainable conflict management.

First, stronger implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 could help reduce tension along the border. This would require greater support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL so they can more effectively monitor the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River. Clearer communication channels, regular coordination, and stronger mechanisms for investigating violations could also help prevent small incidents from escalating into broader conflict.

Second, civilian protection should be treated as a central priority rather than only a consequence of military decisions. This includes supporting displaced families, protecting homes, schools, farms, hospitals, and infrastructure, and ensuring that communities in southern Lebanon receive reconstruction assistance and long-term economic support. Strengthening local community capacity is especially important because southern communities are often the first to experience the effects of escalation and may receive limited support from the central government.

A third intervention involves strengthening Lebanese state institutions. Many internal tensions surrounding the conflict are connected to the state's limited ability to provide security, services, and political representation to all communities. Greater investment in southern Lebanon, stronger public institutions, and increased support for the Lebanese Armed Forces could reduce the conditions that allow non-state actors to fill gaps left by the government. However, this approach would need to recognize that disarmament or changes to Hezbollah's military role cannot be treated as a simple technical issue. It would require a broader political process that addresses security concerns, trust, and the history of occupation and state neglect.

Diplomatic engagement is also necessary. Direct negotiations between Israel and Hezbollah may be politically difficult, but indirect channels through the United Nations, the United States, France, Qatar, or other mediators can help manage escalation. These efforts could focus on practical agreements, such as protecting civilians, reducing military activity near the border, clarifying disputed areas, and creating procedures for responding to violations before they develop into larger attacks.

The June 2026 Israel-Lebanon framework agreement illustrates both the promise and the limits of this kind of diplomacy. It incorporates several elements consistent with the interventions above, including a phased Israeli withdrawal, an expanded security role for the Lebanese Armed Forces, and international oversight of disarmament (Al Jazeera, 2026b). At the same time, because it was negotiated between Israel and the Lebanese government without Hezbollah at the table, it also demonstrates the practical limits of state-to-state diplomacy when a powerful non-state actor remains outside the process: an agreement Hezbollah has not accepted is unlikely to be enforceable on the ground, whatever its terms provide.

Finally, conflict-management efforts should address the narratives that keep the conflict entrenched. This does not mean asking people to ignore occupation, displacement, rocket attacks, or civilian loss. Instead, it means creating space for public discussion that recognizes the fears and suffering of different communities while maintaining accountability for violence.

Communication efforts that avoid dehumanizing language, acknowledge civilian harm, and distinguish between political disagreement and collective blame may not end the conflict on their own, but they can reduce hostility and make future agreements more acceptable.

The comparative analysis suggests that mediators should not rely on a single vocabulary when presenting these initiatives. An intervention framed only as Israeli security may be heard in Lebanon as ignoring occupation and civilian harm, while one framed only as resistance may disregard Israeli civilian insecurity and the Lebanese sovereignty question. A more viable approach would connect the three concerns: verifiable protection for northern Israeli communities, protection and reconstruction for southern Lebanese communities, and a phased process that expands Lebanese state authority while addressing the security fears that sustain support for Hezbollah's weapons. This narrative-sensitive framing would not erase political disagreement, but it could make practical agreements harder to portray as the complete surrender of one side's identity or security.

These interventions are unlikely to resolve the conflict immediately. However, they may help reduce the likelihood of escalation, improve civilian protection, strengthen Lebanese sovereignty, and create more space for long-term de-escalation.

Conclusion

The Israel-Hezbollah conflict cannot be understood only through cross-border attacks, military escalation, or ceasefire agreements. In Lebanon, it is rooted in the history of the Palestinian cause, Israeli invasions and occupation of southern Lebanon, the emergence of Hezbollah, weak state authority, regional alliances, and the experiences of communities that have repeatedly lived through war and displacement. These factors have created competing narratives of resistance, security, sovereignty, and civilian suffering that shape how different groups understand the conflict and what they believe should happen next.

Using the Change-Oriented Conflict Analysis framework shows that the conflict remains difficult to resolve because its roots are political, historical, cultural, and regional. Israel's security concerns, Hezbollah's resistance narrative, Lebanon's sovereignty debate, and the fears of civilians on both sides all continue to influence the conflict. The killing of Hassan Nasrallah in September 2024 and the resumption of full-scale war in March 2026 confirm rather than resolve this analysis: leadership losses and additional ceasefires have not settled the underlying questions of disarmament, sovereignty, and security that first produced the conflict, and each new round of fighting has reinforced the narratives that make compromise difficult. While no single intervention can resolve these issues immediately, stronger civilian protection, greater support for Lebanese state institutions, more effective implementation of Resolution 1701, and continued diplomatic engagement, including with Hezbollah itself rather than around it, could reduce harm and lower the risk of future escalation. A long-term solution would require addressing not only military arrangements, but also the unresolved questions of security, accountability, legitimacy, and state authority that continue to keep Lebanon caught in the conflict.

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