

NO PEACE WITHOUT PROCESS CHANGING COURSE ON HEZBOLLAH'S ARMS

BY **SAMI HALABI & GISELLE JETTI**

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A pragmatic framework to unify national defense and security under Lebanese state control

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fifty years since Lebanon's civil war began and our country is once again at a crossroads between existential threat and the slim possibility for peace. The crux today is Lebanon's enduring military dualism, an inherently destabilizing condition wherein Hezbollah maintains a significant armed force parallel to that of the Lebanese state. This situation is fundamentally incompatible with national sovereignty, long-term social stability, or economic prosperity. Yet, it must be recognized that Hezbollah's army and sprawling, quasi-state apparatuses also arose in response to the Lebanese state's inability to assert national dominion. The country has for decades faced existential threats, particularly from Israel, and foreign interference from Iran, Syria, and many others. At the same time, a labyrinthine entanglement of sectarian identities and economic interests within Lebanon has also hobbled national cohesion. Hezbollah has built its legitimacy among a substantial portion of the Lebanese population by providing what the state has not, particularly within the Shia communities of the South and the Bekaa Valley.

The policy debate around Hezbollah's arms has, for too long, been mired in ideological oversimplification and dangerously reductive rhetoric. When United States diplomats and some Lebanese politicians refer to Hezbollah as a "cancer," they implicitly dehumanize millions of Leb-

anese citizens who continue to support, or at least sympathize with, the party and its armed resistance. At this publication, we vehemently disagree with Hezbollah's parallel military forces outside the state, given their detrimental effects on Lebanese governance and sovereignty. Yet we also condemn those who would demonize our fellow Lebanese citizens. Labelling Hezbollah supporters as enemies or a malignant presence to be eradicated—especially when it falls under the pretext of protecting Israel, a state whose aggression underpins the region's security crises—is not only ethically untenable, but strategically self-defeating.

Quick-fix solutions or externally driven ultimatums to immediately disarm Hezbollah are naïve and risk plunging Lebanon into renewed civil conflict. Those advocating for such simplistic measures overlook the profound social reality: for peace and stability to be possible, the Shia community and other historically marginalized groups must feel protected and represented within the Lebanese state, confident that their security and economic needs will be genuinely addressed. Without this trust, the Lebanese state will remain weak, and the country will continue brimming with instability that can easily spill over its borders, especially as foreign powers continue to try and use it to further their vested interests.

WHAT THIS FRAMEWORK POLICY PROPOSES

Our framework is anchored around two interconnected pillars: one addressing military integration, and the other socioeconomic and institutional reform. Firstly, we propose a phased integration of Hezbollah's military capabilities under the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and other security forces. This process would unfold incrementally, initially incorporating technical expertise, specialized weaponry, and select personnel from Hezbollah's ranks into a revitalized national military and security structure. The LAF in particular must undergo a fundamental internal reform focused on operational modernization, financial sustainability, merit-based recruitment, and robust civilian oversight – measures indispensable for its transformation into a credible national defense institution capable of effectively deterring Israeli aggression and managing internal security.

"Our proposal moves Lebanon from the dangerous inertia of ideological deadlock toward a structured process rooted in political realism, institutional pragmatism, and strategic alignment of domestic and international interests."

Secondly, recognizing Hezbollah's embedded socioeconomic role, we propose pragmatic integration of its extensive civilian and social service networks into reformed state structures. This process is intended to safeguard the essential services Hezbollah currently provides – particularly to historically marginalized communities – while progressively aligning them under

national regulation and accountability mechanisms. At the same time, economic stabilization efforts, particularly addressing Lebanon's profound financial crisis, must move forward decisively, demonstrating to the public that structural reform is achievable. This dual-track approach links tangible socioeconomic improvements directly to military integration, reinforcing trust, state legitimacy, and public confidence in the feasibility of comprehensive national reform.

Rather than promising rapid fixes or idealistic solutions, it lays out a practical roadmap designed to build trust incrementally, sustainably, and crucially, without marginalizing or demonizing any community or constituency.

NO EASY FIXES

This framework policy is presented neither as the definitive nor singular solution to a multifaceted crisis, but as a realistic guide designed to move Lebanon's political conversation beyond moribund ideological battles. Its goal is to outline practical steps towards integrating Hezbollah's military apparatus into the LAF, concurrently restructuring the national defense strategy to offer a credible, state-led deterrent against Israeli aggression. Importantly, it recognizes Hezbollah's socioeconomic infrastructure as a reality that must be pragmatically incorporated into reformed and accountable state institutions, rather than dismantled recklessly.

Simultaneously, this paper acknowledges and explicitly links military dualism to Lebanon's crippling financial crisis – a catastrophe driven less by technical shortcomings than by a political elite that thrives on sectarian division and the systematic economic exploitation of the nation. The banking and financial oligarchy that has looted Lebanon's economy and the political forces that sustain military dualism are two sides of the same coin: a dysfunctional governance system that pits Lebanese citizens against each other for narrow political and economic gain.

We issue this framework mindful that genuine windows for transformational change in Lebanon are generational opportunities. Our proposal is neither idealistic nor utopian, but pragmatic and necessary. Our intent is to foster a more mature and honest dialogue around military dualism, free from the divisive sloganeering and scapegoating that have long plagued this issue and Lebanon's politics.

INTRODUCTION

ADDRESSING LEBANON'S MILITARY DUALISM

Lebanon's military dualism – whereby Hezbollah maintains a standing army and security services independent from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and state security services – has existed since the end of the country's 1975-1990 civil war. Hezbollah's justification for such has morphed over the years: before 2000, the Israeli occupation of vast swathes of South Lebanon provided the *raison d'être*, while in the years since, an ineffective LAF necessitated a militarized Hezbollah to ensure Lebanese sovereignty over the country's south and as a deterrent to deter Israeli expansionism.

These justifications, and the parallel military and security Hezbollah structures they supported, have long been contentious in Lebanon. However, several seismic shifts in the political and regional geostrategic landscape have returned the issue to the fore and created genuine impetus for change. In November, a ceasefire agreement ended the latest Hezbollah-Israel war, which left thousands of Lebanese dead, hundreds of thousands displaced, and many areas of the country destroyed. In early December, Syria's Assad regime collapsed, removing what had previously been a key Hezbollah ally with significant influence over Lebanese policymaking. January then saw the inaugura-

tion of President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, ending more than two years of political deadlock in Lebanon; both officials espouse a reformist agenda that includes bringing Hezbollah's military architecture under LAF control. Hezbollah officials themselves have also voiced increased willingness to discuss the future of their armed wing within the context of a national defense strategy. Together, these factors have created a window of opportunity to address Lebanon's military dualism and realign the country's security architecture and national defense strategy.

The obstacles remain numerous. Within Lebanon, the fundamental rationale for Hezbollah's independent military apparatus remains: the Lebanese state and its armed forces continue to lack the capacity to deter Israeli incursions on Lebanese sovereignty. The domestic calculus for Hezbollah's ongoing military role is also still apparent: although the Shia community is thought to be Lebanon's largest sect and retains powers through its control of the parliamentary speakership, the broader confessional power-sharing system has historically relegated them behind Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims. In such a context, Hezbollah's arms and the implicit recourse to force they represent have conferred protection upon the Shia community, preventing it from being steamrolled by other sects in government policy-making. As well, the intertwined nature of Hezbollah's military, political, and social services wings in its narrative as a resistance organization entails that the former cannot be addressed in isolation from the organization's other roles.

Internationally, Hezbollah is also a fulcrum between competing world powers. Israel, the primary threat to Lebanon's territorial integrity, has the near-unlimited and unconditional military and diplomatic support of the United

"Hezbollah officials themselves have also voiced increased willingness to discuss the future of their armed wing within the context of a national defense strategy."

States, the world's predominant superpower. The pro-Israel lobby in most Western countries also helps to curtail overt criticism and efforts to restrain Israeli military belligerence in the region. On the other side, Iran, Israel's arch-rival, has armed, trained, and funded Hezbollah to act as a forward operating base and create a foil against Israel and deterrence from Israeli and American attacks. These dynamics mean the effort to transition Hezbollah's arsenal to the Lebanese state's control must also include an international pillar in tandem with the domestic one, lest foreign interests become spoilers of the process.

TRANSITION WITHIN WIDER NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Hezbollah's multidimensional significance to Lebanon's Shia community, and its embedded role in the country's broader social and political landscape, demands an approach to military transition that fully accounts for why these arms emerged and have endured. A phased and pragmatic process is needed that accounts for security stabilization, institutional reform, and socioeconomic transition within Lebanon, as well as the need for international mechanisms to help safeguard Lebanese sovereignty from Israeli aggression and occupation. Lebanon must acquire a security architecture that replaces Hezbollah's unilateral military deterrent capacity with state-led defense structures backed by international guarantees.

"In this context, the state assuming a monopoly over arms in Lebanon should be framed as part of a more extensive national reconciliation process between the country's sects."

These international guarantees are not, however, in themselves sufficient to protect Lebanese sovereignty. Today's geopolitical landscape is littered with broken treaties and discarded assurances. The presidency of Donald Trump illustrated vividly how even solemn international agreements can evaporate overnight, especially when American diplomacy is explicitly aligned with Israeli policy. Equally, Iran's consistent ambiguity – offering gestures towards cooperation while reinforcing its proxy networks – demonstrates the hollowness of relying on vague diplomatic promises. Thus, the moment for Lebanon to achieve genuine transformation is less a matter of external assurances than of internal Lebanese calculation—particularly Hezbollah's recognition of its precarious position. With traditional supply routes imperiled, domestic political support fraying, and regional patronage increasingly uncertain, the party faces perhaps its best—and possibly last—opportunity to recalibrate on terms that can restore national coherence. International guarantees would help legitimize and reinforce this shift, but their value lies in their alignment with hard-headed national interests, not in any illusory goodwill.

This process must recognize the historic socioeconomic marginalization of peripheral communities – such as the predominantly Shia Muslim areas in South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley – and seek to re-center the Lebanese state as the provider for and protector of all citizens.

The larger reconciliation process will be long and complex, potentially involving broad-based, trust-building measures such as a South African-style Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a parliamentary-led dialogue conference, a national development program, and broad-based public sector accountability mechanisms. However, a near-term milestone should be establishing a new, robust National Defense Strategy (NDS) centered around a revitalization of the LAF. This should include the phased, selective integration of Hezbollah weapons and military personnel under the LAF, leveraging Hezbollah's technical expertise in various areas – such as militarized

NAVIGATING INTEGRATION: BRINGING HEZBOLLAH'S SOCIAL AND MILITARY ARMS UNDER STATE CONTROL



drones, missile technology, among other institutional knowledge – to bolster Lebanese army capacities.

Hezbollah's military transition must also occur in parallel with state reforms at the political and institutional level to ensure that Hezbollah's community does not perceive integration as a loss to their community or an existential threat, but as part of a broader national social, political, and security realignment. Thus, any military transition process must also recognize Hezbollah's deeply entrenched role in Lebanon's socioeconomic landscape and that a viable transition requires the party's buy-in. That will not be possible unless, as the group's military capacity is integrated into the state, it is able to pivot its focus to the civil services and social protections it provides its constituents – which are generally more efficient and effective than those provided by the Lebanese state. Consequently, integrating Hezbollah's civilian and social services must be approached pragmatically, evaluating each case individually. Those services central to cohesive national governance should be absorbed into the state apparatus, while others can be progressively aligned under relevant regulatory frameworks—thus steadily reinforcing state legitimacy across Lebanon's diverse communities.

PILLAR I: DEFENDING LEBANON A NEW NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

Structural constraints that have historically undermined Lebanon's ability to assert a unified security framework. The LAF, despite its status as Lebanon's national military institution, remains hobbled by chronic underfunding, operational fatigue, a lack of advanced capabilities to address emerging threats, and a weak mandate. Reliant on international funding – primarily the United States, France, and Gulf states – the LAF faces both financial and political limitations. In its current state, the Lebanese army is ill-equipped to absorb Hezbollah personnel and equipment, or present a credible alternative to the group's military deterrent.

A cornerstone of Hezbollah's military transition is the development of a cohesive and robust National Defense Strategy that clearly defines the LAF's role as Lebanon's primary security guarantor. This requires a strategic national security realignment from Hezbollah's asymmetric deterrence model toward a state-led defense posture, so as to garner the interest of diplomatic actors to secure sustainable military assistance. Key steps include:

- **Codify Lebanon's Security Doctrine:** The government must articulate a formal security doctrine establishing the LAF as the sole military force responsible for national defense, integrating defensive postures that previously fell under Hezbollah's control. Codify Lebanon's security doctrine
- **Upgrade Lebanon's Air & Missile Defense Capabilities:** The LAF must be equipped with advanced air defense systems, surveillance infrastructure, and precision deterrence capabilities to deter Israeli threats. This includes securing defense partnerships with Western and regional allies or other emerging actors. This element is critical to provide Lebanon with the deterrence force in the south of Lebanon.
- **Strengthen LAF Presence Along the Borders:** Expansive LAF deployment south of the Litani River is critical to ensuring that security responsibilities once held by Hezbollah are fully absorbed into state institutions. Intelligence-sharing mechanisms with UNIFIL and other international stakeholders (such as the ceasefire monitoring mechanism co-chaired by the United States and France) should support this effort. Enhanced LAF border enforcement should also extend along the eastern and northern frontier with Syria. Deterrence force in the south of Lebanon.

LAF AND SECURITY SERVICES REFORM AS A PREREQUISITE FOR INTEGRATION

Before integrating Hezbollah personnel, the LAF and other state security services must undergo deep structural reforms to enhance efficiency, strengthen their chains of command, and eliminate vulnerabilities that could be

exploited during the transition. These foundational reforms will help prepare these state institutions to absorb Hezbollah personnel without compromising state sovereignty and legitimacy. In particular, they should ensure that integration does not result in Hezbollah maintaining a parallel influence network within the army and security services. These reforms include:

- **Reform and Modernize:** The LAF and other security services must embark on an ambitious internal reform focused explicitly on operational effectiveness, technological advancement, and financial sustainability. This involves rebalancing its unsustainable expenditure structure—currently dominated by personnel costs—by rationalizing troop numbers, recalibrating retirement and benefit systems, and reallocating resources towards modernizing equipment and infrastructure. Transparent financial management, strengthened civilian oversight, and a strategic shift towards operational capabilities adapted to contemporary security threats are essential. Crucially, these internal transformations must align with international donors' strategic interests to secure sustained funding streams, thus creating a capable, modern, and fiscally sustainable national military that can credibly assume security responsibilities previously monopolized by Hezbollah.

- **Command and Control Reinforcement and Capacity Building:** The LAF and other security agencies must strengthen centralized military doctrine to prevent factionalism and ensure strict chain of command discipline. Reinforced command and control capacities will also help support professionalism throughout the ranks.

- **Optimizing Security Sector Expenditures:** All Lebanese security services must urgently adopt transparent, accountable, and strategically aligned frameworks for managing finances and human resources. At present, personnel costs dominate budgets largely due to the entrenched practice of sectarian-based recruitment. Security institutions must cease to function as channels for

sectarian patronage or public employment schemes and instead prioritize operational effectiveness in national defense and internal security. While immediate reform will inevitably clash with constitutional safeguards for grade-one public sector positions and deeply rooted historical practices, there remains considerable room for reform beyond these limitations. A transitional strategy should thus focus on gradually phasing out older personnel recruited through sectarian quotas, replacing them incrementally with younger, merit-based recruits. Over time, this shift will significantly enhance operational efficiency, reduce waste, and recalibrate Lebanon's security apparatus towards its core mission: safeguarding national sovereignty and internal stability.

PARALLEL MILITARY AND SECURITY INTEGRATION

Hezbollah's military integration under the LAF should happen in parallel with, and be supported by, general security sector reform within Lebanon, with Hezbollah's local security networks also being integrated into national institutions. As national institutions take on increasing prominence over local law enforcement and national defense, this process will continue to center the state as the guarantor of order and social stability in Lebanon, helping to reinforce the broader national reconciliation process. Tenets of the integration process should be:

- **Cooperation to Prevent Security Vacuums and the Proliferation of Nonstate Armed Groups:** Both military and security integration should involve cooperation between state institutions and their Hezbollah counterparts to prevent power vacuums during the transitional process. From a security standpoint, joint patrols and operations should facilitate this process in the near term. In terms of the military transition, Hezbollah-LAF information-sharing mechanisms, such as joint operations rooms, should oversee and facilitate each phase of the integration process to ensure continued alignment with

the overall NDS. Stakeholders must remain vigilant that Hezbollah's transition does not result in the emergence of alternative security structures or new nonstate armed groups that seek to replace Hezbollah's role.

- **Selective Integration of Personnel:** Absorbing Hezbollah personnel into state military and security apparatuses should be selective rather than wholesale to mitigate the risk of factionalism within state institutions. The vetting process must parse between ideologically committed veterans whose entrenched loyalties are likely to remain with Hezbollah, and newer, more transactional recruits with higher prospects of successfully integrating with state structures, given the right incentives. Selection of Hezbollah personnel for integration in state military-security apparatuses should also be merit-based to foster high-functioning institutional capacity and limit bloat. Retraining for these recruits should involve ideological and national loyalty conditioning. Consideration must also be taken regarding their disbursement throughout the LAF ranks to mitigate sectarian imbalances in any given unit.

- **Weapons Collection and Oversight:** A phased, monitored handover process must be implemented to track Hezbollah's arms stockpiles, ensuring compliance with reform reforms. This should include the registration and storage of unauthorized weapons, followed by either their disposal or integration into the LAF, depending on which complies with security sector reform aims and the national NDS.

- **Employment Support for Personnel Not Selected for Integration:** When appropriate, Hezbollah personnel not selected for military integration should be transitioned into the civilian public service or offered severance and assisted in securing private sector employment (see below Pillar II). Social stability would be at risk if state programs did not provide alternative economic and social pathways for newly unemployed Hezbollah members who had built livelihoods within the group's ecosystem.

DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY GUARANTEES

Meaningful international security guarantees against Israeli incursions will be crucial support for the NDS's success and the LAF's ability to replace Hezbollah as the protector of Lebanese sovereignty in the country's south. Without these credible international assurances integrated into Lebanon's defense framework, it will remain politically untenable among Hezbollah's support base for the organization to relinquish its military role. Thus, in addition to internal reforms, Lebanon must negotiate binding international security guarantees to safeguard its territorial integrity. These guarantees should replace Hezbollah's justification for maintaining an armed wing while providing Lebanon with credible military and economic backing. Steps include:

- **Securing Bilateral and Multilateral Defense Agreements:** Lebanon must engage with key security and economic partners – including France, the US, Arab states, or others – to formalize mutual aid pacts that provide military and non-military mechanisms to deter Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

- **Establishing Diplomatic Framework:** Mechanisms to fast-track diplomatic interventions in the event of renewed conflict with Israel should be established, creating a further deterrent to the use of force.

- **Expanding Military Aid Programs:** Stakeholders with vested interests in regional stability should expand military aid and defense procurement agreements with the LAF, allowing it to professionalize and modernize its operational capacities.

- **Balancing Regional Pressures:** Given Iran's strategic ties to Hezbollah, any transition must avoid triggering regional destabilization. This requires a diplomatic approach that seeks the support of regional actors that sign onto a 'one nation, one army' security framework for Lebanon. Should regional actors reject this framework,



high-level diplomatic engagement must be maintained to mitigate spoiler effects.

PILLAR II: NON-MILITARY INTEGRATION AND REFORM

Hezbollah's military, political and socioeconomic branches are integrated into an overarching resistance narrative, culture, and organizational structure. Fundamental changes to group's military positioning, such as incorporation into the LAF, is thus unlikely to garner the necessary buy-in to succeed without addressing the wider ecosystem through which Hezbollah has integrated itself with its constituency. Any transition process must be approached as a phased, multi-year structure with parallel military and non-military tracks. The non-military transition must also result in the Lebanese state becoming the primary provider of basic services and socioeconomic protections for the country's Shia community, while the country's Parliament and judicial systems become places where the community feels it has access to political and legal recourse.

In the absence of effective state services and accountability mechanisms, Hezbollah's extensive social and economic infrastructure has provided essential services to marginalized Lebanese communities for decades. The transition process' goal should not be to dismantle Hez-

bollah's social role but to integrate its effective service delivery mechanisms into a reformed Lebanese state, ensuring that these institutions function under national governance rather than operating in parallel to it. This process must balance state regulation, economic stabilization, and international buy-in, allowing for a transition where Hezbollah's socioeconomic functions contribute to state-building rather than remaining outside of it.

LEVERAGING CAPACITY: RETAINING HEZBOLLAH'S SOCIAL SERVICES EFFECTIVENESS

Hezbollah has demonstrated its ability to provide efficient and large-scale social assistance where the Lebanese state has failed. Its networks in healthcare, education, reconstruction, and financial assistance have filled critical gaps for populations that have historically been neglected. Rather than losing this expertise, Lebanon must find a way to incorporate Hezbollah-linked institutions into the national system, ensuring they are regulated and accountable but remain operationally intact. Key steps include:

- **Formalizing Hezbollah's Social Institutions:**

Hezbollah's affiliated organizations providing health, education, and welfare services should be registered as NGOs or public service providers, ensuring compliance with national laws and oversight mechanisms.

- **Integrating Financial Services Under State Regulation:**

Institutions like Al-Qard Al-Hassan, which function as de facto banks, must be brought under the supervision of Banque du Liban (BDL) and operate within national financial regulations, ensuring transparency and systemic stability.

- **Reorienting Assistance Programs Toward State-Sponsored Initiatives:**

Hezbollah's social aid programs should transition into state-supported social safety nets, ensuring that assistance is not politically or sectarian-driven but accessible to all Lebanese citizens.

SAFEGUARDING THE INTEGRATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND SOCIAL PROTECTIONS

There should be a phased approach to incorporating Hezbollah's parallel civilian and social services infrastructure under state supervision. The first step requires state institutions to progressively improve their essential services delivery, accountability, and monitoring to be comparable to those Hezbollah has long provided. Under integration, Hezbollah's civilian operations remain intact to avoid economic and social destabilization. However, as state institutions are strengthened, Hezbollah's parallel structures will be brought under a system of national regulation, ensuring baseline standards and consistency country-wide, and thereby fostering national cohesion.

To safeguard the integration process, particular care must be taken with the following:

- **Preventing Parallel Bureaucracies:** Hezbollah's institutions must transition within the Lebanese legal framework, preventing the emergence of semi-autonomous service networks that bypass state authority.

- **Avoiding Sectarian Domains within Public**

Service Delivery: The transition must ensure that state resources and services remain universally accessible to all Lebanese, rather than reinforcing exclusive or sectarian economic enclaves.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION & PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Hezbollah military-security personnel not incorporated into the LAF or other state security structures require viable economic and livelihood alternatives in the civilian realm. A key component of ensuring a smooth reintegration process is community development and local investment in economic opportunities that absorb this workforce and create long-term stability. Key priorities include:

- **Encouraging Gulf and Western Investment**

in Infrastructure: Foreign investment in labor-intensive fields – such as reconstruction and infrastructure projects and energy sector development – can provide employment at scale for those shifting away from Hezbollah's security structures.

- **Bolster Domestic SME Investment Environment:**

Government policies should incentivize Lebanese to reshore capital and invest in small- and medium-sized enterprise development. This should include tax incentives and support for new entrepreneurs. Particular effort should be made to spur economic activity in historically underserved regions.

- **Developing Vocational Training Programs:** Targeted training programs should be established to retool and upskill individuals transitioning from military or security roles into the civilian workforce. These programs should be tailored so that the labor market expertise they create matches prevailing human resources demands.

POLITICAL NORMALIZATION UNDER NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Hezbollah's military transition requires that the organization have a plausible pivot into being a primarily political entity. The transition must thus be structured under the national reconciliation process to ensure that Hezbollah,

and the Shia constituency more broadly, retains appropriate political representation within Lebanon's democratic framework as the party relinquishes its military role. Necessary steps to achieve this include:

- **Aligning Hezbollah's Political and Security Transition:**

Given Hezbollah's established political presence, the transition must ensure that elements of its military wing relevant to the national security framework are absorbed into state institutions under Pillar 1, while its political apparatus continues to operate within Lebanon's democratic system. This process should be structured to reaffirm Hezbollah's role as a political actor while preventing any informal security structures from emerging outside state control.

- **Preventing Political Marginalization:** Efforts must be taken to ensure Hezbollah's military transition is not construed or arranged as an effort that will weaken Shia political representation. It must be clothed in language emphasizing loyalties to the state and national reconciliation, and as a realignment of the national security architecture that benefits all Lebanese citizens. Should the public imagination be captured by the idea that the military transition is a zero-sum political maneuver by Hezbollah opponents, political deadlock and a transition freeze would likely ensue.

- **Pursue Economic Development to Supplant the Political Clout of Arms:**

Hezbollah's arms have long provided the clout by which the Shia community, and in particular marginalized areas in South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, have secured a voice in government policy making. While the implicit political veto Hezbollah's arms created must end, meaningful economic development and investment in marginalized areas should be pursued to offset the sense of disenfranchisement communities will feel about the party relinquishing its arms to state control. Without this supplanting effect, resistance to the military transition may be widespread.

- **Reforming Sectarian Political Representation:** There must be electoral and governance reforms ensuring that none of Lebanon's sectarian communities feel alienated from the political process or unfairly represented within Lebanon's power-sharing system. This will be a long, arduous process within the umbrella of national reconciliation, and Hezbollah's military transition cannot be contingent upon these reforms being finalized and implemented. Meaningful progress in this area, however, will lend immense credibility to the military transition process, and thus such be pursued with urgency by domestic leaders and receive international backing.

"Restoring Lebanon's institutional integrity, economic health, and national sovereignty requires pursuing a comprehensive reform agenda involving both Hezbollah's integration and a decisive confrontation of the banking sector's daylight robbery."

- **International Guarantees to Ensure Domestic Credibility for Military Transition:** Concrete, enforceable international guarantees buttressing the LAF's ability to deter Israeli aggression are required to bestow credibility upon the domestic political process associated with Hezbollah's military transition. These guarantees must be binding and long-term, ensuring sustainability beyond immediate political cycles.

RESOLVING LEBANON'S FINANCIAL CRISIS: A PARALLEL IMPERATIVE

Any credible strategy for integrating Hezbollah's military and social institutions under state control must con-

front another profound crisis that afflicts Lebanon – the financial and banking sector collapse, which was driven by entrenched political sectarianism and its cross-over with vested financial interests. Indeed, Hezbollah's weapons are only one part of Lebanon's dual crises: military dualism on one side, and on the other, an economic dualism wherein the interests of a narrow banking and political elite have overridden public welfare, effectively stripping the state of both legitimacy and financial viability.

Addressing this financial catastrophe is not an auxiliary measure but a crucial strategic pillar. Just as meaningful progress on Hezbollah's integration requires a recalibration of political interests and alliances, so too does resolving the banking-driven financial meltdown, which demands confronting entrenched oligarchies that benefit from the status quo. Implementing an IMF-backed financial stabilization program, enforcing genuine regulatory oversight, and carrying out structural reforms – such as banking sector restructuring, transparent fiscal management, and reform of state-owned enterprises – are thus not merely economic actions but profoundly political steps.

The linkage between military integration and economic stabilization is as strategic as it is symbolic: each reinforces the other's credibility and viability. If Lebanon can demonstrate tangible progress in resolving one seemingly intractable crisis, public confidence and political leverage to tackle the other will naturally follow. Both crises are symptomatic of a single political failure: the unwillingness to subordinate narrow sectarian or elite interests to a broader national imperative.

LOOKING AHEAD

Hezbollah did not emerge in a vacuum: the group was born in response to Israeli aggression and military occupation of South Lebanon, and gradually evolved into a potent political, military, and social force. Over the

years, its alliance with Iran and its growing political influence allowed it to monopolize significant power within the country, a dynamic that was inherently unsustainable and risked reigniting civil strife. However, the recent conflict with Israel, the fall of the Assad regime, and other factors have shifted the dynamics around Hezbollah's weapons, offering an opening for Lebanon to address one of its most intractable post-civil war issues.

What the nation now faces is both an opportunity and a choice. By bringing Hezbollah's military capacities into the Lebanese Armed Forces, its social networks into regulated state institutions, and its political clout into a reformed system of governance, Lebanon can begin to heal longstanding rifts and deliver much-needed services to all citizens—Hezbollah's core constituencies among them. Admittedly, neither the Lebanese state nor Hezbollah itself is entirely prepared for such a profound restructuring of power; the legacy of parallel military and social structures cannot be undone overnight.

Yet, the current momentum offers the most realistic chance in decades to break the cycle of ideological stalemates over disarmament. The alternative—returning to entrenched positions and endless debates—risks further conflict and national stagnation. Given shifting regional dynamics, the status quo ante is no longer feasible. Moving forward with a robust military transition plan, grounded in political pragmatism and technical rigor, may be arduous and lengthy, but it is the most likely path to sustained peace and sovereignty.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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