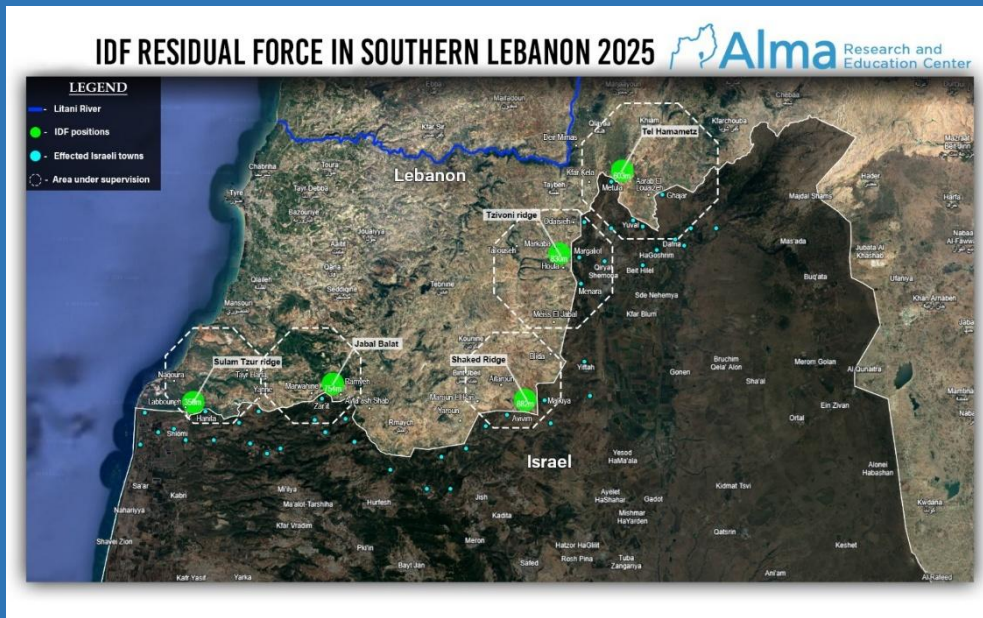
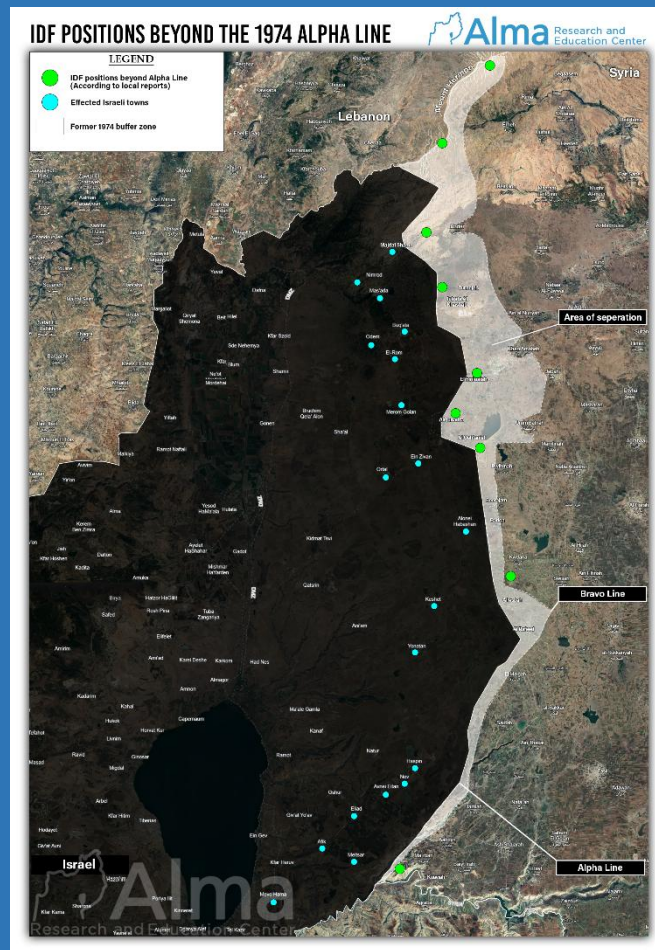


The Security Needs of Israel in the North Do Not Allow for Withdrawal From Lebanon and Syria



By: Yaakov Lappin and Tal Beeri

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Executive Summary:

Despite a flurry of international diplomatic activity intended to stabilize the situation on the Israel - Lebanon border and the Israel - Syria border, the basic requirements on Israel's part for a safe and sustainable withdrawal of the IDF from forward positions in southern Lebanon and southern Syria do not exist for the time being, and it is doubtful whether they will exist in the near future.

In Lebanon, the basic identity of Hezbollah as a Shiite - religious - ideological - armed movement, makes its voluntary disarmament – an Israeli demand and a condition for withdrawal from southern Lebanon – impossible.

Likewise, the Lebanese army does not have the ability to fundamentally, systematically, and truly disarm Hezbollah, even if it and the new Lebanese government have the intentions to do so.

To date, the removal of Hezbollah's military capabilities has been carried out mainly by a successful Israeli war effort in 2024, in the form of a maneuver, senior leadership assassinations, the beeper operation, and massive aerial attacks.

After the ceasefire agreement, on November 27, 2024, Israel continues to be the only significant factor that prevents Hezbollah from rebuilding its strength, through daily aerial attacks, and according to reports, periodic ground raids.

Hezbollah's arsenal of weapons is the source of its power and its main value for its patrons in Iran; Giving up what remains of the firepower capabilities, or the intention to rebuild, would be an act of 'ceasing to be' for Hezbollah.

In Syria, the new Sunni regime under the leadership of Ahmed al-Sharaa is driven by the main goal of re-establishing centralized state sovereignty over all parts of the country.

This goal directly conflicts with Israel's supreme security demands for an expanded and demilitarized southern-Syrian buffer zone, which includes the territories south of Damascus.

This demand became absolute in light of the fact that al-Sharaa's new national army is composed in large part of militias and among them, 'former' jihad operatives, who in March and July 2025 carried out a massacre of the Alawite minority in northwestern Syria and the Druze minority in al-Suwayda in southern Syria.

The presence of the IDF in five outposts in southern Lebanon, and in nine positions on the Syrian side of the 1974 separation of forces line is not a temporary bargaining chip, but a necessary and long-term security position, adopted in the face of a diplomatically unsolvable reality, since both Hezbollah and the al-Sharaa regime do not intend to fulfill the Israeli conditions for withdrawals from the two northern fronts.

Any diplomatic process that tries to ignore this fundamental conflict is doomed to failure.

This conclusion is given added weight in light of Israel's new security doctrine, which emphasizes the objective of removing the enemy's capabilities as a top priority, and rules out the approach of containment, restraint, or buying quiet by ignoring the building of strength of jihadist elements on Israel's borders, as a direct lesson from the October 7 attack by Hamas.

Lebanon: No Israeli Withdrawal in Sight

The political dead end in the Lebanese arena is defined by an absolute and unbridgeable conflict between Hezbollah's intentions to rebuild with the help of Iran, and Israeli determination, backed by daily attacks, to prevent this.

On one side is Israel's demand for security based on its explicit conditions and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which calls for an area free of military infrastructure and any weapons (except for the Lebanese army and Lebanese security forces) south of the Litani River.

On the other side stands the very existence of Hezbollah, a non-state religious player - with an ideology that calls for incessant armed "resistance" [to Israel's very existence], whose internal power and regional importance all stem from the weapons arsenal it is being asked to give up.

The ongoing diplomatic efforts, led by the United States, operate on a false premise that this chasm can be bridged through utilitarian agreements. In reality, the core demands touch on the existential identity of the players, which makes a solution acceptable to both sides unattainable.

For Israel, the legal and security baseline for any future arrangement in southern Lebanon is the full and unambiguous implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. The resolution, which was unanimously adopted to end the Second Lebanon War in 2006, is for Israel a binding framework for the security of the northern communities, and to prevent Hezbollah's Radwan unit from rebuilding the capability to invade the Galilee.

The Radwan unit, which according to estimates currently numbers about 3000 operatives and additional support personnel, has indeed for the most part moved away from the border area with Israel following the war, but is currently engaged in rebuilding and re-deploying for activity in the south when required.

For this purpose, its operatives are present and active in the south at all times, as evidenced by reports of the elimination of Radwan operatives in southern Lebanon every week.

The central clauses of Resolution 1701 call for "the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon" and the establishment of an area south of the Litani River that would be free of any armed presence, weapons or authority other than that of the Lebanese government (and the UNIFIL force).

This demand is not a maximalist opening position for negotiation; in light of Hezbollah's continued trend of rebuilding military strength in aspects such as building and renewing operational plans, training, re-organization, and weapons production, the reality of a southern Lebanon free of Hezbollah's attempts to rebuild itself is perceived by the Israeli security establishment as an existential necessity for the continuity of northern Israel.

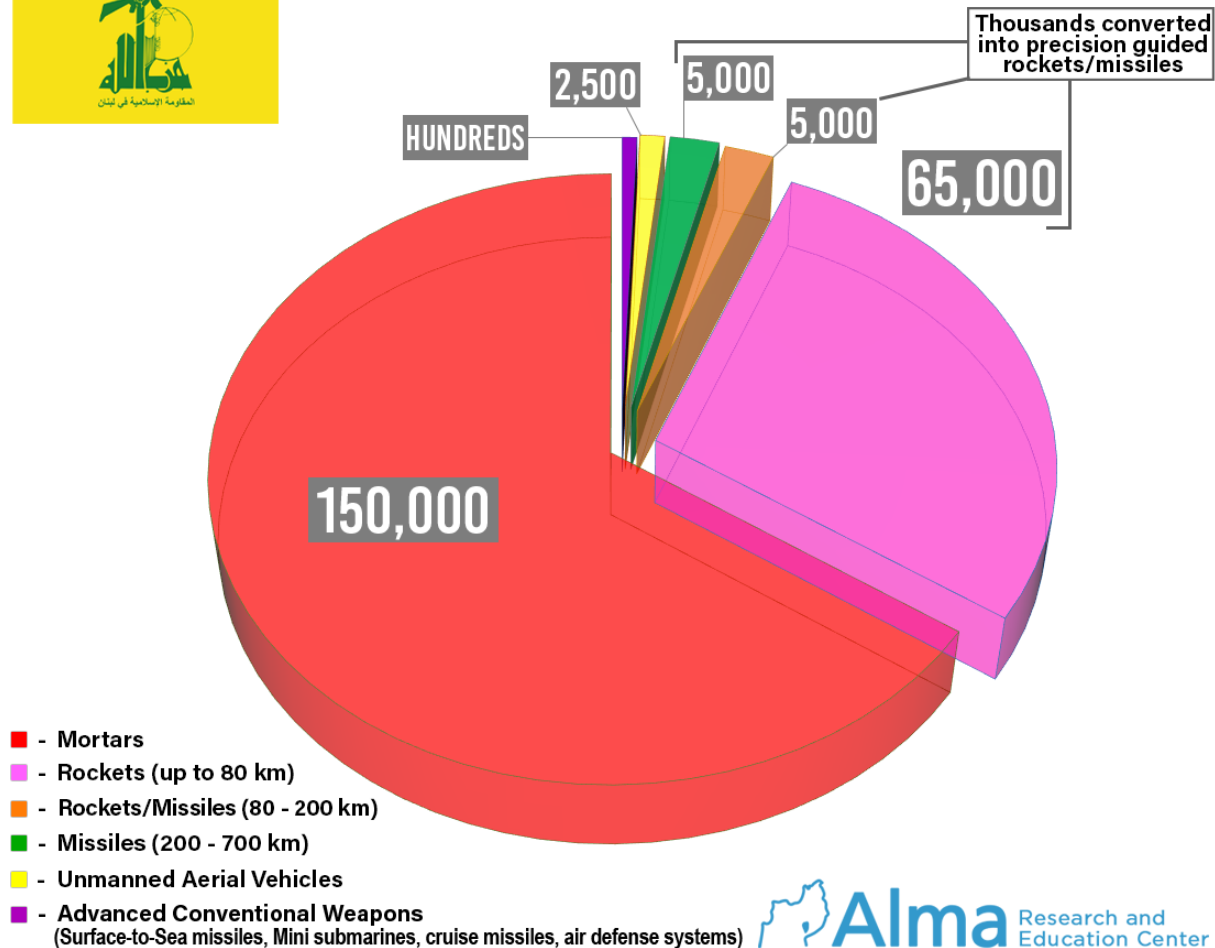
Israel, in the shadow of October 7, 2023, is determined to prevent the Shi'ite terror army, supported by Iran, from building and rebuilding its capabilities on its northern border.

Likewise, Israel is determined to prevent Hezbollah from renewing the projectile threat to the entire Israeli home front.

Before October 2023, this entire arsenal included about 230,000 mortar shells, rockets and missiles of all ranges and thousands of drones.



HEZBOLLAH WEAPONS ARSENAL ASSESSMENT



Alma Research and Education Center

According to IDF estimates from July 2025, about 60 to 70 percent of Hezbollah's operational abilities were damaged and Hezbollah's projectile firing capability was reduced to small volleys and they are experiencing difficulty in synchronizing volleys. Likewise, the IDF destroyed between 70% and 80% of Hezbollah's short-range launching posts.

However, it should be remembered that Hezbollah is currently still capable of firing dozens of rockets and missiles daily at Israel.

The continuous presence of the IDF in five border outposts creates political tension, since Lebanon demands the removal of the IDF, but this presence is a direct tactical result of a systemic and long-standing failure to implement Resolution 1701. These outposts serve as a forward defense line, a narrow security strip.

They provide critical intelligence and operational advantages in an environment where the international forces (UNIFIL) and local forces (Lebanese army) 'proved' their inability to prevent Hezbollah from rebuilding its military infrastructure up to the Blue Line.



Hezbollah's response to the demands for its disarmament is consistent, public and absolute.

The organization's leadership rejects the demand for disarmament as a basis for negotiation, and interprets it as a demand for unconditional surrender.

Na'im Qassem, the current Hezbollah leader, was unequivocal. He swore that his organization would not lay down its weapons in response to Israeli threats or American proposals, and stated that "this threat will not cause us to accept surrender."

He framed the issue as self-defense against Israeli "aggression," claiming that "defense does not require permission" and that any discussion about disarmament can only begin after Israel's actions cease and it withdraws from all disputed points.

These declarations are not just rhetoric; they reflect the basic logic of Hezbollah's existence.

Its entire identity is built on its role as an Iranian forward military force against Israel.

This military capability is the ultimate guarantee for continued Iranian support and its political dominance within Lebanon, especially among the Shi'ite base.

Its arsenal of weapons, supplied and funded by Iran, and full social services for the Shi'ite base, have so far allowed it to operate as a state-within-a-state, to project power from within and to serve as a critical forward base for the Iranian regime's "Axis of Resistance" against Israel, and against Western interests in the region.

Disarmament would be tantamount to political and ideological suicide for Hezbollah. It would strip Hezbollah of its main source of leverage, turn it into just another political party in Lebanon's fractured system, and nullify its purpose in the eyes of its Iranian patron.

The diplomatic efforts (as of this writing led by the American envoy Tom Barrack), which according to reports are offering significant reconstruction funds and a guaranteed Israeli withdrawal in exchange for a clear timeline for disarmament, are completely misreading this reality.

They present a utilitarian solution to an ideological-religious problem. Hezbollah's weapons are not a bargaining chip that can be traded for economic benefits;

It is the essence of its power and its purpose. Hezbollah without its weapons is not relevant according to its own perception. The rifle on the flag is not a decoration. This is a clear statement.

Hezbollah is currently buying time and constantly trying to carry out a more ambitious building of strength for the future.

This analysis remains valid even after the Lebanese government ended a tense four-hour meeting on August 5 which focused on the US-led proposal for Hezbollah's disarmament. In a historic decision, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam announced that the government had officially tasked the Lebanese army with preparing "an operational plan, to be submitted by the end of the current month, to implement a timeline, which will end by the end of the current year, according to which weapons will be exclusively in the hands of the state." Hezbollah, for its part, threatened a direct confrontation and civil war if this decision is implemented by the Lebanese government, and this is a confrontation that the Lebanese government is not prepared to manage.

The entire framework of Resolution 1701, and by extension, the current American diplomatic push, rests on the assumption that the state of Lebanon, through the Lebanese army (LAF) and with the support of UNIFIL, can serve as a reliable guarantor of security in the south. This assumption has been proven wrong for nearly two decades and also today.

The Lebanese state mechanism is not a neutral arbiter; it is a system held hostage by Hezbollah's military and political power.

Even when Hezbollah is weakened, there is no appetite within the state of Lebanon for a direct confrontation or civil war, despite the recent declarations that indeed signal a desired change in position, but mainly at the rhetorical level and not at the practical level.

However, a scenario of civil war should not be ruled out, especially if Hezbollah truly feels its back is against the wall.

Recently, Hezbollah has even leveraged such a scenario to its advantage as part of its threats in response to the issue of disarmament.

This reality is openly known within Lebanon itself. Samir Geagea, the leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces party who is defined by Hezbollah as "persona non grata," sharply criticized the state's top leadership — the president, the prime minister, and the speaker of the parliament — for adopting a position on the American proposals that is "completely identical... to what Hezbollah wants." Berri, the Shiite chairman, and a key ally of Hezbollah, did not offer to enforce disarmament, but only to try and persuade Hezbollah to carry out "initial disarmament steps."



Samir Geagea

The Lebanese army, even though it receives American aid, is politically and operationally limited, institutionally weak and probably still militarily inferior to Hezbollah.

Although the Lebanese army claims that it captured most of Hezbollah's positions in the south of the country, the Lebanese army is very far from dealing with all of Hezbollah's weapons and there is a lack of evidence that it actually dismantled terror infrastructures or located and destroyed the organization's weapons.

On the contrary, it is highly likely that a part of the "captured weapons" are actually remnants of weapons that were left in the area after being attacked, duds and the like that are not functional anyway.

Likewise, in light of the fact that there are many Shi'ite officers and soldiers in the Lebanese army who assist Hezbollah in one way or another, it is highly likely that some of the "captured weapons" are returned to Hezbollah.

In addition, similarly to the situation before the war, even today, the Lebanese army is limited in its movement and cannot reach and enter all the areas in southern Lebanon, especially not the areas that Hezbollah currently defines as military areas.

According to IDF publications from July 2025, since the ceasefire agreement on November 27, 2024, 1,263 Hezbollah violations were transferred to the agreement's enforcement mechanism - 71 percent of them in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese army dealt with 453, the rest were enforced by Israel, and a minority were not enforced.

It should be noted that these are violations that are known about. It can be assumed that there are many more violations that are not known about, since Hezbollah ultimately operates as part of the rebuilding process, mostly under the radar and in secrecy in order to allow for 'rebuilding quiet.'

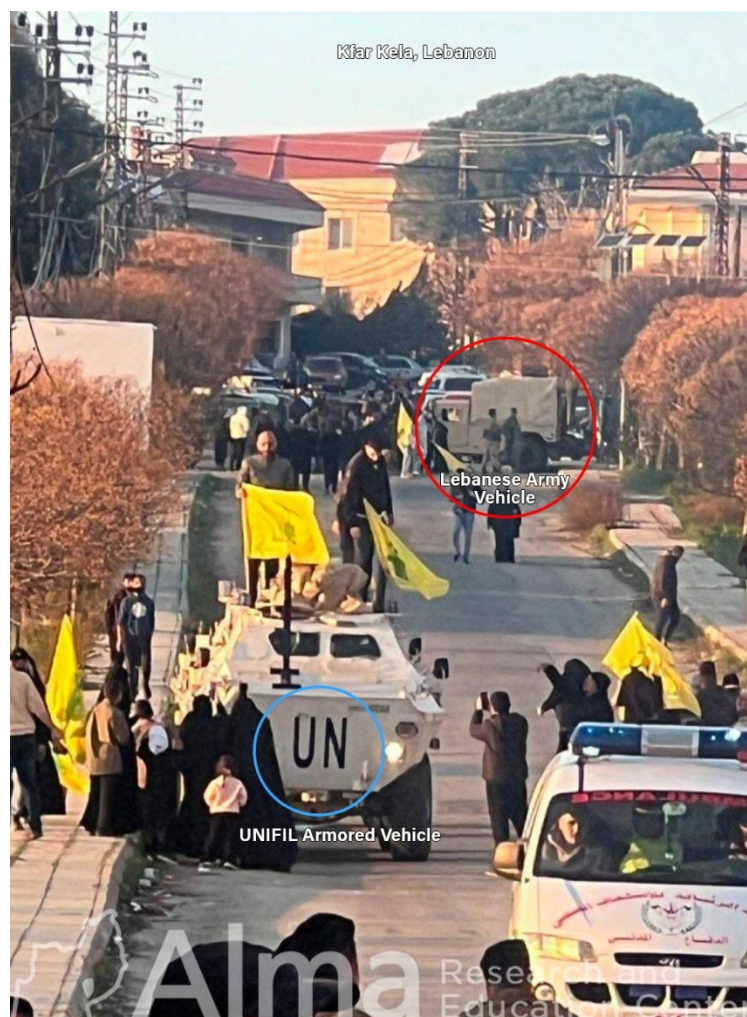
The steps that have been taken by Lebanon so far should be encouraged, while recognizing the reality that they do not come close to the threshold required to prevent Hezbollah from rebuilding itself.

UNIFIL's role is even more limited. Its mandate is to monitor and report, not to enforce. It cannot forcibly disarm Hezbollah, and the freedom of movement of its soldiers since the ceasefire agreement, is routinely limited by so-called 'civilians,' some of whom were actually sent by Hezbollah and some of whom are Hezbollah operatives who control the area. UNIFIL can only act as a mediator, document violations, and support the Lebanese army where possible, but it did not even do this during its years of operation in Lebanon.

De facto, UNIFIL served as a human shield for Hezbollah, which exploited UNIFIL's infrastructures and built many military infrastructures near them that were intended to serve as a platform for attacking Israel.

UNIFIL has no ability to prevent Hezbollah from re-arming or deploying its forces. This was demonstrated blatantly in early 2025 when, following a ceasefire, Hezbollah actively organized and encouraged the Shi'ite population to return to the villages in the south. This was not a spontaneous movement, but a calculated operation to re-establish Hezbollah's presence, use the population as a human shield, and create incidents to strengthen its narrative that its armed presence is necessary to "defend" the citizens of Lebanon.

The military force of UNIFIL is currently a superfluous, useless and even harmful force, which should be dismantled and canceled immediately.



The diplomatic process, then, is a false pretense at its core. It proceeds as if a sustainable deal is possible, in which Hezbollah's weapons arsenal is a tradable asset that can be exchanged for political or economic incentives.

This ignores the basic reality that this arsenal is the source of Hezbollah's non-negotiable power.

According to the words of the previous Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, "they will take our souls before they take our weapons, not because we love weapons, but because weapons are a symbol of honor and pride..."

"The Resistance" is the core of the organization. Will Hezbollah really disarm "and give up" the Kalashnikov that appears on its flag?

Will it give up "the Resistance"?



The negotiation is built around a false premise, according to which Israel is offering to trade tactical positions for strategic security, while in fact, it is asking Hezbollah to trade its very existence for benefits that it believes it can achieve anyway through coercion.

The dead end is not a failure of diplomatic skill, but a reflection of an unbridgeable conflict of core interests and identities.

Where will this conflict of interests and identities lead us? It is hard to know. It is possible that the process that Lebanon is currently undergoing, a process that greatly affects Hezbollah, could lead to the opposite situation of internal escalation and perhaps at the end of such an escalation, to Hezbollah's behavior as a "wounded animal."

This could lead, in the worst-case scenario for Lebanon, to a civil war.

On November 20, 2024, about a week before the ceasefire, Ibrahim al-Amin - the editor-in-chief of the al-Akhbar newspaper, which is Hezbollah's main mouthpiece, wrote: "The current confrontation is just another round in the war against Israel that must be destroyed and for this purpose Hezbollah will work to rebuild its capabilities and re-arm..."

This sentence is in fact the essence of Hezbollah's core concept: no peace. No compromises.

There is one ideology, and it is incessant armed conflict.

The Syrian Puzzle - The Conflict of Sovereignty and Security

In the Syrian arena, the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, and the rise of Ahmed al-Sharaa (known previously by his jihadist alias - Abu Muhammad al-Jolani) to power, did not lead to an era of potential peace, but created a new security challenge for Israel.

On the one hand, there is the existential need of the new Syrian regime to re-establish centralized state sovereignty over a nation split by strengthening stability, governance, and establishing public order.

On the other hand, there is Israel's uncompromising security demand for a deep and demilitarized buffer zone in southern Syria, free of any Islamist - jihadist military presence - a category which, from Israel's perspective, absolutely includes the new Syrian national army, a large part of which is composed of militias with an explicit jihadist character.

In addition, from the perspective of both sides, is the existing threat to stability and security from Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, ISIS and other additional armed groups operating in Syria in general and in southern Syria in particular.

On August 5, the IDF Spokesperson announced that an Air Force aircraft, guided by the Northern Command, attacked in the Bekaa region in Lebanon and eliminated Hussam Qassem Gharib, a terrorist from the Hezbollah terror organization, who was operating from Lebanese territory to guide terror squads in Syria, who planned to fire rockets at the Golan Heights. This is one example among many of the attempts by terror elements - both from the Shiite axis and from the extreme Sunni axis, to continue to establish a foothold in southern Syria.

Israel's response to the collapse of the Assad regime was quick and decisive, and was guided by an offensive-defense doctrine designed to manage the power vacuum that was created.

When the opposition forces advanced toward Damascus, the security cabinet decided to capture the Syrian part of the demilitarized zone that was established in the 1974 separation of forces agreement.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the 1974 agreement was null and void, and declared that Israel "will not allow any hostile force to position itself on our borders."

This was immediately accompanied by a massive wave of aerial attacks on December 8 and 9, 2024, which systematically destroyed a significant part of the remaining military arsenal of the Syrian army, including advanced aircraft, air defense systems, and heavy weapons.

The explicit goal was to prevent these capabilities from falling into the hands of the new regime or unknown elements.

Since then, Israel has placed a clear and uncompromising system of red lines for southern Syria.

The main demand is the demilitarization of the entire area south of Damascus, which includes a ban on the deployment of any Syrian army units, a ban on the presence of advanced or 'game-changing' weapons that could threaten the Golan Heights, missiles, artillery, armored vehicles, and large infantry forces. The current deployment of the IDF in nine key forward positions on the Syrian side of the border serves as the physical enforcement mechanism of these red lines.

This is a deployment designed to directly control the security environment, instead of relying on guarantees from a new government, which as of this writing, from an Israeli point of view, cannot be trusted.

Across the border, Syria's new leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, is promoting a political plan whose central theme is the opposite of fragmentation: national reconstruction and centralized sovereignty.

His entire political project is the transition from a militia leader to a head of state, and this transformation is conditional on his ability to prove that he is the leader of a coherent, united and sovereign nation.

In his victory speech in January 2025, al-Sharaa presented his main goals: "Rebuilding the state's institutions, especially the army, security and police forces," and "restoring Syria's regional and international status" based on the principles of "sovereignty" and "dignity."

One of his first key actions was to order the dismantling of all independent military rebel factions and their integration into a new, unified Syrian army under central command.

His government is actively working to promote unification agreements with various groups across the country, such as the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), in an effort to return all of Syria's territory to the control of Damascus.

For al-Sharaa, accepting a de-facto security zone under Israeli control in the south, in which his national army is not allowed to operate, would be a blow that is not to be tolerated to this entire project.

It would publicly undermine his legitimacy, and present him not as the restorer of Syrian sovereignty, but as a weak leader who is unable to control his territory.

Therefore, Israel's demand for a demilitarized south is not just a security issue for Damascus;

it is a direct and existential challenge to the fundamental principles of the new Syrian state.

The violent clashes in the Druze province of al-Suwayda in July 2025 served as a difficult demonstration of this unbridgeable conflict.

The al-Sharaa regime, which sought to suppress the fighting between local Druze and Sunni-Bedouin militias and establish its authority, deployed two main forces for action: army forces and internal security forces.

Israel immediately identified the deployment as a violation of its red lines, and reports of serious war crimes being committed during the fighting began to be published massively.

The Israeli Druze community cried out for help. Israel responded with significant aerial attacks against the Syrian forces, as well as against the Syrian General Staff in Damascus, and against a "military target" in the presidential palace in the Syrian capital. This was a necessary action to protect the Druze minority against an even greater massacre driven by jihadist perceptions against a non-Sunni Muslim minority.



This placed the United States in an impossible situation. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio called on the Damascus regime to use its security forces to prevent jihadists from entering the area, while at the same time, American officials, according to reports, were "completely surprised" by the Israeli attacks and urged direct talks instead of bombs.

Israel also carried out, according to reports, an operation to transfer humanitarian and medical aid to the Druze community.

The Suwayda incident reveals the central contradiction. Al-Sharaa's deployment was an act of a new regime trying to enforce its sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders, while part of its forces carried this out in a murderous way (at this stage it is unclear whether this was an independent initiative or a clear regime directive).

Israel's military response was an act of a state enforcing a zone free of Syrian army and security forces far beyond its borders.

The American call for Damascus to supervise the area is illogical when Israel's policy is to bomb the same forces that are supposed to carry out the "supervision."

Israel's decision to allow meager regime forces to enter al-Suwayda for a limited period does not change the equation.

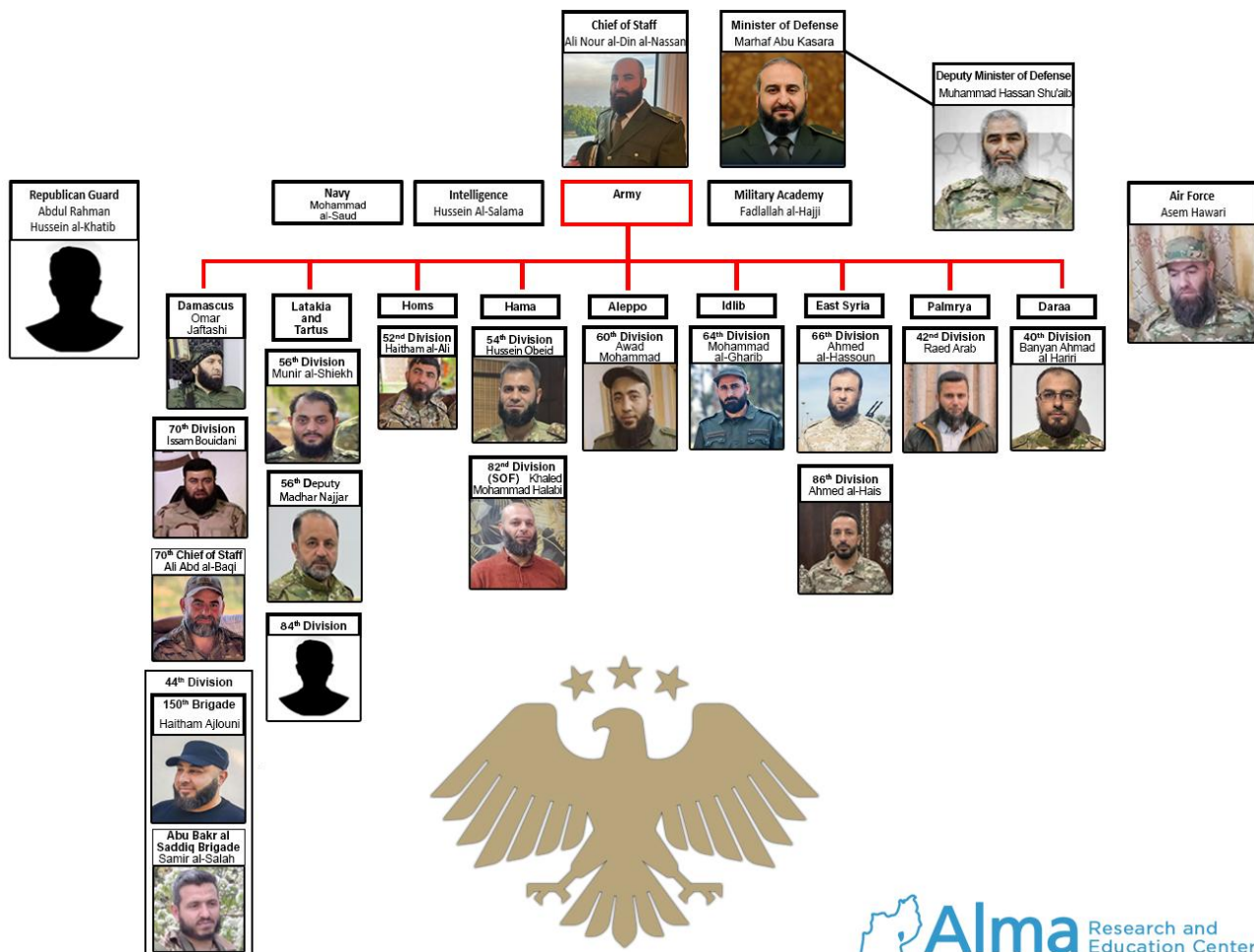
The main obstacle to a non-war agreement between Syria and Israel is the nature of the new Syrian army. This force is not a professional and neutral army; it is a direct product of the civil war in Syria, established from a combination of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other allied rebel factions.

HTS, which al-Sharaa led, is the direct successor of Jabhat al-Nusra, which for years was the official Syrian branch of al-Qaeda.

While al-Sharaa has made a significant effort to re-brand himself and his movement — publicly breaking with al-Qaeda, disavowing global jihad, fighting against ISIS, and promising to protect minorities — this transformation is viewed with deep skepticism by many in Israel.

From Israel's point of view, based on capabilities and a worst-case scenario analysis, al-Sharaa's moderation is likely tactical, not ideological. His army is composed of thousands of fighters steeped in a decade of Salafi-jihadist ideology and combat. Dressing them in new uniforms and giving them the title "national army" does not erase their origin, their training, or their deep ideological potential for hostility toward Israel.

SYRIAN ARMY SENIOR OFFICIALS WITH JIHADIST BACKGROUND



This creates a paradox from which there is no diplomatic way out. The very actions that al-Sharaa must take to legitimize his rule and build a stable and sovereign Syrian state — namely, deploying his army — are precisely the actions that Israel perceives as a direct and unacceptable threat to its national security.

The parallel dead end on the Lebanon and Syria fronts, despite the occasional differences in character and details, paints a unified and sobering picture of Israel's northern security landscape.

A comprehensive analysis of the core demands of all sides, the limitations of international diplomacy, and the uncompromising nature of the fundamental conflicts leads to a clear conclusion: an Israeli withdrawal as a result of negotiations should not be considered a reasonable outcome in the near future.

The current status quo of forward defense and threat management, although tense and full of risks, represents the more stable strategic reality for the foreseeable future.

In both cases, a withdrawal would be a relinquishment of strategically vital territory — observation posts on commanding ground and buffer zones — to these players based on promises of good behavior in the future.

The Israeli security calculation sees such a move as an unacceptable gamble.

The risk of non-withdrawal (maintaining the forward positions and managing the friction) is consistently assessed as lower than the risk of withdrawal and creating a vacuum that will be immediately and inevitably filled by a strengthening enemy.

The logic is clear: it is better to deal with the threat from a distance than to allow it to establish itself directly on the border.

Front	Israel's Core Demand	Opponent's Position / Reality on the Ground	Main Obstacle to a Solution
Lebanon	Full implementation of Resolution 1701: Complete disarmament of Hezbollah and its verified withdrawal north of the Litani River.	Hezbollah explicitly rejects disarmament, and sees its arsenal as vital to its identity and power. The state of Lebanon is de-facto unable to enforce this.	Ideological and structural: Hezbollah's identity as an armed "resistance" is not negotiable. The structure of the Lebanese political system protects Hezbollah's power.
Syria	A demilitarized southern buffer zone: No Syrian army or other hostile forces south of Damascus. No advanced weapons.	The main goal of the al-Sharaa regime is to restore centralized sovereignty over all of Syria, governance and stability. This requires the deployment of its army throughout the country.	Sovereignty and identity: A fundamental conflict between Israel's security doctrine and the need of the Syrian regime to establish state control. Israel defines the new Syrian army as fundamentally problematic because a large part of it is built from jihadist militias.

Limitations of American Diplomacy

The United States remains a critical player in the region, which is working in an attempt to reduce tensions and mediate agreements.

However, there is a fundamental divergence between American and Israeli strategic goals.

The main goal of the US is regional stability. This translates into a policy aimed at preventing a renewed collapse of the Syrian state, fostering a functioning (even if weak and limited) government in Lebanon, and avoiding a large regional war.

This pursuit of stability may, at times, conflict with Israel's need to prevent threats.

For example, the Trump administration removed sanctions from Syria to give the al-Sharaa regime an opportunity to stabilize the country.

From Washington's point of view, a stable Syria under al-Sharaa, even if its army operates in the south, may be preferable to the chaos of a renewed civil war.

For Israel, it would have been better to condition the removal of sanctions on actions from Syria and not just talk.

Similarly, in Lebanon, the US is taking a determined approach that demands the dismantling of Hezbollah's weapons arsenal, a welcome and unambiguous American position in itself, but does not fit with the Lebanese reality.

The price for an IDF withdrawal from its forward positions in Lebanon and Syria is a system of reliable, verifiable, and sustainable security guarantees that will neutralize the threats emanating from those areas. An analysis of the players involved proves that this price is not achievable as of today.

Neither Hezbollah nor the al-Sharaa regime are willing to provide such guarantees, and Lebanon as a state, is unable to provide them.

Therefore, the IDF must not withdraw. The current situation - characterized by a low-intensity but continuous conflict, active international diplomacy that masks an unbridgeable gap, and an Israeli position of forward defense - should not be a temporary stage before an arrangement. This should be the new and entrenched strategic reality on the northern front.

Sources