

4. Security institutions

4.1. Lebanese Armed Forces

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), is an all-volunteer conventional military[242] with conscription abolished in 2007.[243] It consists of the Army Command, Navy, Air Force, Special Units, and Ground Forces.[244] Personnel is recruited from across Lebanon's various confessional communities.[245] The LAF is estimated to number approximately 80 000 personnel,[246] of these, around 5 000 troops have been deployed to southern Lebanon,[247] with further redeployment to the south of the Litani River as of 27 November 2024.[248] On 13 March 2025, Lebanon's Cabinet approved the enlistment of 4 500 additional soldiers in three phases to strengthen the LAF in the south; by 20 June 2025, 1 341 of the first 1 500 had been deployed south of the Litani River, bringing the total LAF personnel there to 7 522 across 116 geographical positions.[249]

While the LAF is formally responsible for maintaining security across the country, it continues to face major challenges due to chronic underfunding and limited manpower.[250]

While Lebanon's military spending increased by 58 % in 2024, to USD 635 million,[251] the LAF remained poorly equipped and heavily reliant on outdated weapons and ammunition provided by the United States and other Western countries.[252] The LAF has limited operational capabilities, with roughly 200 tanks, over 600 armoured vehicles, 32 additional armoured vehicles delivered between 2018 and 2021, and a modest air force with around 5 fixed-wing aircraft, 30 helicopters, and a few reconnaissance drones, a navy of nearly 70 vessels focused on coastal and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) security, and specialised units such as marine commandos.[253] It also lacks aircraft defence and fighter jets and does not have a proper 'mandate from the government to take over the defence of the country' according to a Sergeant of the LAF, as cited by EL PAÍS, a Spanish newspaper.[254]

Daher stated, in an interview with the EUAA, that 'the deeply embedded system of sectarian loyalty undermines the authority of the army and the police, whose powers are regularly overshadowed by the influence of sectarian leaders'.[255] Similarly, Lebanese Journalist, Hala Nasreddine, reported that the Lebanese Army's absence from clashes between Hezbollah and Israeli forces reflects structural weaknesses rooted in sectarian power-sharing, with army's leadership divided along confessional lines.[256]

The LAF also faces deteriorating infrastructure and logistical and communication gaps.[257] According to Daher, 'the LAF has never been capable of fully defending Lebanon's territory. She attributed this to the confessional system, in which power is divided along sectarian lines, limiting the army's mandate and cohesion.'[258] Daher further described that 'the LAF is

composed of officers and soldiers from different sectarian and ideological backgrounds; some within the army support Hezbollah, while others oppose it, yet this does not prevent coexistence in the field'.259

In contrast, Rym Momtaz, editor in chief of Strategic Europe, noted that despite these structural and funding challenges, the LAF has 'managed to preserve its cohesiveness,' remains 'operationally capable,' and has actively defended southern Lebanon even under fire from Israel, while improving border monitoring and counter-smuggling efforts.260 As Israel's ground invasion intensified, the LAF began 'repositioning' its forces in the south—not as a retreat, but as a strategic move reflecting an army that, though constrained, 'has a chance to find purpose in the aftermath' of the conflict.261 According to the President of Lebanon, the LAF 'missions are not limited to maintaining internal security, but also include combating terrorism and drug smuggling, protecting and monitoring the borders, alongside other security missions.'262

As of 1 April 2025, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the LAF restarted patrolling along the Blue Line263— the demarcation line established by the United Nations in June 2000 to confirm Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, which runs roughly 120 kilometres along the Lebanese-Israeli border.264 Moreover, as of 3 June 2025, the LAF has taken control of several strategically important border highlands in southern Lebanon previously occupied by non-state armed groups.265 Daher described that 'the central issue is not replacing Hezbollah's territorial presence, but ensuring the defence of Lebanese territory against Israel is carried out under state authority. The government's stated aim is for the LAF, not Hezbollah, to take primary responsibility for this role, since Hezbollah conducts such defence without coordinating with the state and acts on its own initiative.'266 Accordingly, the LAF has taken steps to assert state control in the south, repositioning its forces to manage defensive responsibilities independently of non-state actors.267

However, on 27 August 2025, the UNIFIL spokesperson stated that the Lebanese Armed Forces did not have the capacity and resources to fully assume responsibility in the south due to the country's financial crisis and the continued presence of Israeli forces inside Lebanon.268 While the country is recovering from the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, the Lebanese Army faces the challenge of extending state authority nationwide, including disarming the Iran-backed militia, that could alter the army's role and Lebanon's balance of power.269 For detailed information on the disarmament process, see section 6.2 Overview of security dynamics related to recent developments with Israel.

On 11 September 2025, in correspondence with the EUAA, Lebanon expert Dr. May Maalouf Monneau, who is a political scientist specialised on the Middle East, with a focus on Lebanon, and associate researcher at Mediterranean and Middle East Research and Study Institute (IREMMO), Paris, stated that 'while the LAF is very active in some regions, it struggles to maintain order and faces particular challenges in areas such as the south, where it had been absent for several years.'270 On 16 September 2025, UNIFIL handed over 101 vehicles including SUVs, cargo trucks, water tankers, ambulances and baggage dollies to the Lebanese Armed Forces aiming to enhance LAF mobility, security and operational response capabilities in southern Lebanon.271

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