

# The Israel-Hezbollah Ceasefire: A Least Worst Option

[lieber.westpoint.edu/israel-hezbollah-ceasefire-least-worst-option](https://lieber.westpoint.edu/israel-hezbollah-ceasefire-least-worst-option)

December 2, 2024

by [Marika Sosnowski](#) | Dec 2, 2024



*Editors' note: The author has also [addressed](#) this subject on [The Conversation](#).*

It is welcome news that a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has now been approved by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli cabinet, despite right-wing Minister for Security Itamar Ben-Gvir [expressing](#) reservations.

It is a well-established pattern during warfare that fighting increases right before a ceasefire deal comes into force and this case is no exception. The deal came into effect at 04:00 local time on Wednesday, 27 November but over the preceding 24-48 hours there was a dramatic [increase](#) in Israel's bombardment of Beirut, including in the central business district, evacuation orders for numerous buildings and Hezbollah launching hundreds of rockets into northern Israel, and [targeting](#) the home of Israel's air force commander in Tel Aviv with a long-range drone. When implemented, the ceasefire will hopefully offer some level respite for both Lebanese and Israeli civilians after over a year of war.

My research has shown that while ceasefires may be the least worst option humans have so far devised to reduce violence during wartime, they are certainly not a panacea. My research is interested in more carefully analysing the terms and power dynamics of ceasefires to better understand some of their less obvious consequences. Here are five questions and concerns I have about the current Israel/Hezbollah ceasefire.

### **What Happens after 60 Days?**

The ceasefire agreement reportedly has thirteen points that aim to stop hostilities for 60 days. This would, in theory, allow for over 1 million people displaced from southern Lebanon and over 60,000 people displaced from northern Israel to return to their homes. Returning Israelis to their homes in the north has been one of Netanyahu's explicit war goals. Thousands of Israelis from the north have been housed in hotels across the country for over a year at great expense to the government, so there is also a large economic incentive to make this happen.

However, given the relatively short time frame and the fragile nature of the ceasefire, it remains to be seen whether many civilians, on both sides of the border, will take the opportunity to return. Additionally, destruction in the south of Lebanon is extensive, making it difficult for people to return there within the relatively short time frame of the truce. While U.S. President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron have said that the ceasefire will provide the basis for a "lasting calm" the terms of the ceasefire provide no details on what will happen at the end of the 60 day period.

### **Further Strikes on Syria**

A number of terms of the ceasefire are concerned with limiting Hezbollah's ability to rearm during the ceasefire, including calling for unauthorised infrastructure and weapons production facilities to be dismantled. Hezbollah's main patron, Iran, channels weapons to Hezbollah through Syria and the terms of this ceasefire raise the possibility that Israel will conduct more airstrikes inside Syria to ensure weapons from Iran do not reach Hezbollah. While this is not explicitly authorised under the terms of the ceasefire or international law, the ceasefire provides Israel with some justification for such actions on the basis that it is only enforcing the terms of the ceasefire in not allowing Hezbollah to rearm via weapons shipments from Iran. In the wake of the ceasefire announcement, Israel targeted sites on Lebanon's northern border with Syria for the first time, presumably as a way to curb Iran's influence. Further Israeli attacks on targets inside Syria could also be underscored by explicit mention of Israel's inherent right to self-defence contained in this ceasefire deal.

### **The Changing Nature of the War with Iran**

Of further concern is that Israeli daily *Hayom* recently reported that Iran has compiled comprehensive profiles of thousands of Israelis, including academics, as potential targets in both domestic and international operations. Although such a list is not necessarily new, the

recent kidnapping and murder of Chabad Rabbi Zvi Kogan in the United Arab Emirates suggests that while Iran may currently be unable to match Israel's military strength, it is willing to covertly target a range of Israeli citizens abroad calling into question one of Netanyahu's stated war aims of "making Israelis safe for generations."

So far, Iran has shown facit acceptance of the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hezbollah. This may signal that rather than directly confront Israel militarily, it will now turn to more covert operations such as those described above to retaliate against Israel.

## **Enforcement**

In many ways, this ceasefire is based on UN Security Council resolution 1701 that ended the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel. It is ironic that the terms of this ceasefire recognise the importance of 1701 when Israel has largely ignored several other Security Resolutions for a ceasefire in Gaza and arguably 1701 was never fully implemented by Israel or Hezbollah.

Another term of the agreement says that Israel will gradually withdraw from southern Lebanon over a period of up to 60 days. During this time Lebanon will deploy official security forces and the Lebanese Army into the area. *Al Jazeera* has reported that Israel insists that Hezbollah dismantles and leaves southern Lebanon before any Israeli soldier would withdraw. Given that the terms of this ceasefire provide no specific detail regarding the logistics around withdrawal, and Israel's desire to enable the return of Israeli civilians to their homes in the north, it remains to be seen whether and how the IDF will evacuate southern Lebanon. Additionally, the Lebanese Army and security forces are generally seen as being hugely underfunded as well as unable and/or unwilling to challenge Hezbollah's primacy in Lebanon.

Further, another term of the ceasefire says the United States will support indirect negotiations between Israel and Lebanon to achieve an internationally recognised delineation of their border. From 2000, the United Nations demarcated the "blue line" which ostensibly became part of the border between Israel and Lebanon despite the blue line officially being only a "line of withdrawal." The United States' explicit mentioning of negotiations around this line potentially suggests that its route may change as a result of the ceasefire. This may mean Israel, with the militarily superior upper hand in this conflict, the support of the United States and the unclear terms of the ceasefire regarding its withdrawal from the area, retains and holds new territory as a result.

## **Whither Gaza?**

Netanyahu has said that this ceasefire deal will enable Israel to focus its efforts on Hamas fighters in Gaza and his top security concern, Iran. Other officials have called this ceasefire "a game-changer" that would show Hamas fighters in Gaza that the conflict there and in

Lebanon were delinked. Hezbollah had so far insisted that it would not agree to a ceasefire until the war in Gaza ended, but this ceasefire presumes that condition has been dropped.

While some have suggested that this ceasefire with Hezbollah may put additional pressure on Hamas to come to a ceasefire deal with Israel regarding a hostage release, such an analysis overlooks the fact that Hamas has been willing to make a ceasefire deal in the past and it has been the Israeli government that has stymied negotiations by adding new terms at the last minute. This “lack of good faith” negotiation frustrated Qatar so much that it has recently withdrawn as mediator between the parties.

The ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah should not take attention away from the fighting in Gaza, nor the horrific and dire humanitarian situation there. On the contrary, it remains to be seen how Israel’s new focus on Gaza will play out in terms of more formal occupation, whether this ceasefire will help bring about any relief to those most affected by the war, or whether it will only isolate Hamas into a position where it feels it has even less to lose than the vast amount it, and Palestinians, have lost already.

\*\*\*

*Marika Sosnowski is an Australian-qualified lawyer and a Postdoctoral Fellow at Melbourne Law School affiliated with the Peter McMullin Centre for Statelessness.*

Photo credit: Tasnim News Agency

SUBSCRIBE