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Summary

Direct talks between representatives of Lebanon and Israel, the first such talks in decades, conducted under the auspices of the United States of America, culminated on 26 June in the establishment of a "trilateral framework" signed between the three countries. Under the framework, Lebanon and Israel committed to "a reciprocal, sequenced process, with clear conditions, whereby the LAF [Lebanese Armed Forces] will restore effective sovereign authority over all Lebanese territory, pending the verified disarmament of non-State armed groups and dismantlement of associated infrastructure, enabling the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to progressively redeploy out of the Lebanese territory." The deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces to some pilot zones was an initial step towards implementation.

While violence had declined since late June, continued Israeli military operations in southern Lebanon and Hizbullah's refusal to disarm meant that the risk of renewed conflict remained high.

Israel continued to maintain a presence in areas north of the Blue Line. The Government of Israel asserted that it would retain a "security zone" extending up to 10 km into Lebanon pending the disarmament of Hizbullah and other non-State armed groups. The continued maintenance of that zone presented a considerable impediment to the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and constitutes a violation of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Israel Defense Forces also expanded and consolidated their presence on the ground and destroyed alleged Hizbullah infrastructure, while carrying out extensive demolitions of civilian infrastructure and habitations.

In addition, divergence among Lebanese actors over the framework, direct engagement with Israel and the maintenance of weapons outside State control further complicated efforts to implement resolution 1559 (2004). Hizbullah's leadership

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posited that its maintenance of weapons was an internal Lebanese matter, denouncing the trilateral framework and direct negotiations with Israel. Disagreement between Israel and Lebanon on the sequencing of Hizbullah disarmament and Israeli withdrawal, as well as the modalities for verifying disarmament, also hindered progress.

Reconstruction in southern Lebanon remained severely constrained by the continued Israeli presence and military operations, extensive destruction, insufficient financial resources and persistent uncertainty regarding the security and political environment.

I. Key developments

1. During the reporting period, Lebanon and Israel held their first direct negotiations in decades under United States auspices, conducting seven rounds of talks from April to August. The process culminated in the 26 June announcement of a "trilateral framework between the United States, Israel and Lebanon".

2. The framework followed the announcement on 16 April by the President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, that Lebanon and Israel would begin a 10-day cessation of hostilities. According to a statement by the United States Department of State that same day on the agreement, "Israel shall preserve its right to … self-defense" while also committing "not [to] carry out any offensive military operations against Lebanese targets". According to the same statement, the Government of Lebanon committed to taking "meaningful steps to prevent Hezbollah and all other rogue non-State armed groups in the territory of Lebanon from carrying out any attacks, operations, or hostile activities against Israeli targets".

3. The President of Lebanon, Joseph Aoun, on 16 April stated that "the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territories is a fundamental step to consolidate the ceasefire and to redeploy the Lebanese army up to the international borders, fully extend the authority of the State and end any manifestations of armed presence". He also reaffirmed that "negotiations are the sole responsibility of the Lebanese authorities, as they are a sovereign matter in which no one else can be involved". The ceasefire was extended by three weeks following the second round of talks on 23 April. Two further rounds of talks were held, in mid-May and early June, in Washington, D.C.

4. On 17 June, the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, the terms of which provide for an "immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon", by the parties and their respective allies involved in the conflict. The Memorandum of Understanding also includes provisions concerning the parties' commitment to ensuring "the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon". In a joint statement delivered on 16 June in anticipation of the announcement of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, Mr. Aoun and the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Nawaf Salam, considered it "a positive factor in reducing tensions in the region", with Mr. Aoun underscoring the next day that "any settlement will be reached through [the Lebanese State], not at [its] expense". The Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri, welcomed the Memorandum of Understanding, expressing appreciation to both Tehran and Washington, D.C., for insisting on the inclusion of a "binding provision" to halt Israeli attacks on all Lebanese territory, which he said would help safeguard the sovereignty of Lebanon. On 17 June, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Naim Qassem, welcomed the "great victory" of the Islamic Republic of Iran and "thank[ed] the Islamic Republic of Iran for linking the Lebanese arena [to the agreement] … and for compelling Israel to halt its aggression".

5. Despite the 16 April cessation of hostilities, military activity continued in southern Lebanon, although the intensity of hostilities declined following the mid-June announcement of the Memorandum of Understanding. Since 19 June, Hizbullah has not claimed responsibility for attacks on Israel Defense Forces troops unlawfully present in southern Lebanon or against Israel's territory, although Israel has attributed at least three attacks against its troops in southern Lebanon to Hizbullah. The Israel Defense Forces continued to conduct air strikes, artillery fire, demolitions and engineering activities in southern Lebanon in violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. According to the Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon, on 15 August, two separate Israeli strikes killed 11 people and wounded 17, with women

and children among the casualties. On 4 and 5 September, Israeli military operations across southern Lebanon caused at least 27 fatalities and 69 injuries, including of children, women and paramedics, according to the Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon. As at 7 September, the Ministry reported that 4,381 people had been killed and 12,402 wounded as a result of hostilities occurring since 2 March. Between 4 April and 26 August, 30 members of the Israel Defense Forces were reportedly killed in southern Lebanon and two in northern Israel, including a woman. At least 21 Lebanese Armed Forces soldiers were killed during the reporting period.

6. Following the agreement on the trilateral framework, United States-led talks continued, with a fifth round held from 23 to 25 June, followed by a sixth in Rome on 14 and 15 July. On 20 July, the Department of State announced the launch of the "first pilot zones in Lebanon" and identified them as Frun, Surayfa and Zawtar al-Gharbiyah. The same day, the Lebanese Armed Forces announced the "continuation" of its activities in Frun and Surayfa. A day later, the army stated that military units had begun deploying in Zawtar al-Gharbiyah. Speaking from that location, the Prime Minister affirmed that this marked the first step towards securing a full Israeli withdrawal from all Lebanese territory and pledged measures to support the return of displaced residents. The seventh round of talks took place in Rome from 4 to 6 August. On 12 September, Mr. Aoun visited Nabatiyah and Zawtar al-Gharbiyah.

7. Despite diplomatic efforts to secure an enduring cessation of hostilities, Israeli leaders maintained that Israel would retain what it terms a "security zone" in southern Lebanon pending Hizbullah's disarmament. Following the ceasefire announcement on 16 April, the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, stated that the Israel Defense Forces would remain in a "reinforced security buffer zone" extending up to 10 km into Lebanon. Following the signature of the trilateral framework, he said that the United States and Lebanon had "recognized Israel's right to maintain the security zone inside Lebanon … until Hezbollah and the rest of the terrorist organizations are disarmed, and until no further threat to Israel is posed from Lebanon". The Minister of Defence of Israel, Israel Katz, reiterated this position on 12 August during a visit to Israeli troops present in southern Lebanon in violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, stating, "we are not withdrawing from this security zone". Then, he added: "We are destroying the underground infrastructure and all the terrorist infrastructure they built with Iranian backing to invade the Galilee, and we are destroying all the homes in the area. This is our policy." On 4 September, Mr. Katz reportedly stated that the capture of Ali al-Taher ridge marked "the completion of the phase of establishing control over the security zone in southern Lebanon" and was an "important step" towards the disarmament of Hizbullah and the protection of the northern communities of Israel.

8. Lebanese actors continued to set out different approaches regarding how to restore sovereignty and State authority. On 26 June, Mr. Salam, in the context of the signature of the framework agreement, stated that Lebanon "aims to achieve Israel's withdrawal from all Lebanese territories". On 2 July, Mr. Aoun similar stated that Lebanon had engaged in talks "to guarantee Israel's withdrawal from its territory", adding that Beirut would "not yield a single inch of Lebanese territory". On 5 June, Mr. Berri said that the framework should have included an "unconditional ceasefire by land, sea and air", adding that he "agrees to … Hezbollah's withdrawal from south of the Litani River, in parallel with Israeli withdrawal from the areas it occupied." He consistently opposed the establishment of pilot zones, including in a speech on 31 August, noting that "the current phase, with its existential risks to Lebanon, gives no one the right to dispose of any aspect of national sovereignty under any designation, whether a 'framework agreement', 'secret annexes', or otherwise". He subsequently rejected the trilateral framework, stating that it had failed to deliver results.

9. Mr. Qassem opined in a speech on 21 June that the Memorandum of Understanding required an end to hostilities against Lebanon. He urged the Lebanese authorities to leverage what Hizbullah described as its military capabilities and its battlefield gains and the regional influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran when engaging with Israel, rather than relying exclusively on United States mediation. On 14 August, he reaffirmed Hizbullah's rejection of the trilateral framework, calling on the authorities to make use of what he described as the "cards" held by Lebanon, namely, resistance, unity, capability and sovereignty.

10. Consistent with Hizbullah's earlier positions, Mr. Qassem, on 17 June, cautioned against discussing what Hizbullah considered to be internal matters within the negotiations, stating: "Everything related to organizing our internal situation – whether it is the issue of weapons, the economy, national security strategy, defence strategy, or anything concerning Lebanon's internal affairs, even the implementation of Resolution 1701 – must be kept completely outside the negotiations. These are matters we discuss internally."

11. There were no significant updates during the reporting period regarding Palestinian armed groups. Their weapons remain subject to the disbanding and disarmament requirements of resolution 1559 (2004), which apply to all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. Fatah weapons remain the only ones to have been handed over so far.

12. Israel continued to occupy the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

13. There was no progress in relation to the issue of the Shab'a Farms area. Furthermore, neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel has responded to the provisional definition of the area contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) of 30 October 2007 (S/2007/641).

14. Syrian officials have expressed support for Lebanese State institutions and dialogue, rejecting suggestions of possible Syrian intervention against Hizbullah. In a statement delivered on 12 June, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Ahmad Al Sharaa, stressed that "Syria's approach aims to end the war in Lebanon, not to expand it or get involved". On 26 July, he reiterated that the Syrian Arab Republic was "not considering a military intervention, but Syria has several cards that it can offer the Lebanese State to use as it sees fit" and expressed support for "the Lebanese State's monopoly over arms and its decisions on matters of war and peace".

II. Analysis

15. During the reporting period, developments created both opportunities and challenges for advancing the objectives of resolution 1559 (2004), particularly full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon; the disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias; and the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon.

16. The Government's engagement in direct talks with Israel for the first time in decades opened a new diplomatic channel for addressing outstanding issues related to Lebanon's territorial integrity and full sovereignty. Despite domestic criticism, the trilateral framework marks an important step in peace efforts and reflects the Government's commitment to preserving Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including through the withdrawal of Israeli forces, as well as to extending

State authority throughout Lebanese territory and establishing a State monopoly on arms, which are central objectives of resolution 1559 (2004).

17. Turning these commitments into progress remains difficult. Hizbullah's continued rejection of disarmament north of the Litani River, contrary to the Government's decisions and Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), impedes the State's ability to exercise sole and exclusive authority throughout its territory and establish a monopoly over weapons. The process of disarming Hizbullah will require determined action. Progress towards bringing all weapons under the authority of the Lebanese State will require sustained institutional efforts through a whole-of-government approach and a nationally owned process that takes due account of Lebanon's internal stability.

18. Israel's continued presence and military activities north of the Blue Line are a violation of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Additionally, Israel has significantly expanded its military presence in southern Lebanon beyond the positions and "buffer zones" it had previously maintained north of the Blue Line. Although hostilities have declined since their peak in the period from March to June, Israeli forces continue daily military operations, including air strikes and shelling beyond the so-called security zone. Recent weeks have seen indications of a renewed escalatory trend, with extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure and villages by the Israel Defense Forces. Israeli officials continue to claim that this presence will remain pending the full disarmament of Hizbullah and other non-State armed groups, while Lebanese authorities maintain that Israeli military activity and continued presence undermine efforts to extend State authority and hinder the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

19. Progress is further complicated by competing sequencing demands: Israel conditions its withdrawal on demonstrable progress towards Hizbullah's nationwide disarmament, while Hizbullah conditions discussion of its weapons on an end to Israeli violations and the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanese territory. Disagreement over whether the trilateral framework is the appropriate mechanism for restoring full respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity adds to these challenges.

III. Implications

20. The direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel under United States auspices has provided a channel for the Lebanese State to address matters affecting the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity through diplomatic means. The credibility and sustainability of this approach will depend on measures implemented by the parties, including disarmament of armed groups, withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon's territory and deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces, consistent with Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

21. Reconstruction and recovery will also be key elements for extending State authority. While the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout the territory is a critical step, a sustainable State presence will require more than security deployments alone, particularly given the scale of destruction in southern Lebanon. Timely service delivery, reconstruction and conditions for safe and sustainable returns would strengthen public confidence in the State. It will require substantial financial resources, including from international actors, although mobilization remains challenging. In parallel, economic and governance reforms by the Lebanese State are essential for supporting sustainable recovery. Meaningful participation in the reconstruction process by women, youth, displaced persons and returning communities would further allow inclusiveness and enhance accountability of State authority.

22. The trajectory of Lebanese-Syrian relations, based on mutual non-interference, respect for sovereignty and support for Lebanese State institutions, is consistent with Security Council resolution 1680 (2006) and creates a more favourable environment for the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). It can also support broader efforts to consolidate State authority through stronger official channels, improved border management and enhanced institutional cooperation.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

23. **The diplomatic opening created by direct engagement between Lebanon and Israel, which resulted in the trilateral framework, is a significant step towards ending decades of conflict and advancing peace and stability. Disarmament of all non-State armed groups and Israel's withdrawal from all Lebanese territory remain essential to breaking recurring cycles of violence. I call on all parties to fully respect Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to support the authority of its State institutions.**

24. **I reiterate my condemnation of all attacks affecting civilians and civilian objects on both sides of the Blue Line. During the reporting period, Israeli military operations continued at a staggering human cost in Lebanon, including casualties, fatalities and mass displacement of the Lebanese population, with considerable destruction, including to key civilian infrastructure across Lebanon.**

25. **The extension of State authority requires exclusive State control over weapons, in accordance with resolution 1559 (2004) and the Taif Accords. I urge Hizbullah to abide by sovereign Lebanese State decisions. Sustainable disarmament will require addressing the governance, institutional and socioeconomic factors that have enabled weapons to remain outside State authority. A whole-of government approach is needed also to heal long-standing grievances and divisions. Sustainable security cannot be achieved through military pressure; it requires meaningful dialogue and space to address the root causes of the conflict.**

26. **The continued presence of the Israel Defense Forces north of the Blue Line and their military operations are a violation of Lebanon's territorial integrity. They further hinder the Government's efforts to extend its authority and impede returns and reconstruction, including as the destruction of civilian property continues. Statements by Israeli officials announcing the destruction of civilian homes are deeply troubling and must be unequivocally rejected. All parties must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to respect and protect civilians and civilian property.**

27. **I call on Israel to withdraw from all areas north of the Blue Line and cease its violations of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. Israel's establishment and maintenance of what it terms a "security zone" in southern Lebanon violate Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity and are in flagrant breach of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and of relevant Security Council resolutions.**

28. **All parties must abide by the decisions and efforts of the Government of Lebanon to establish a State monopoly over weapons and refrain from military activity inside or outside Lebanon, in consistency with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). The Accords must be preserved and implemented by all in order to avoid the spectre of a renewed confrontation among Lebanese citizens and to strengthen the institutions of the State. I also**

call on those with influence over armed groups in Lebanon to support their disarmament and transformation into solely civilian political actors, in accordance with the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004).

29. **I reiterate my support for the Lebanese Armed Forces in its central role in asserting and extending State authority. Sustained political, financial and capacity-building support from international partners will be essential for the Lebanese Armed Forces and other State security institutions, including the Internal Security Forces, to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Strengthening public confidence in State authority will also depend on the ability of State institutions to respond to the needs and concerns of affected communities, including women and youth.**

30. **The United Nations stands ready to support the Government of Lebanon in its reconstruction efforts. I call on the international community to assist Lebanese institutions in delivering immediate, initiatives that have quick impact in southern Lebanon to rebuild trust with local communities, facilitate returns and recovery and strengthen State authority. I recall the need for safe and sustained humanitarian access in Lebanon.**

31. **The implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) with respect to all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, including Palestinian armed groups, is essential for a comprehensive and credible disarmament process.**

32. **It is vital that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East receive adequate and predictable funding to meet the protection needs of Palestine refugees. The indispensable role of the Agency in maintaining stability in the Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon remains critical.**

33. **I encourage continued engagement between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to deepen institutional, economic and security cooperation, including efforts to curb illicit arms and financial flows.**

34. **I count on the continued commitment of the Government of Lebanon to its international obligations and call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The United Nations will continue its efforts towards the full implementation of those and all other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.**