

MEIRSS
LEBANON WEEKLY BRIEF
21 - 27 September 2026

ABSTRACT

The week of 21 to 27 September 2026 tested whether the Lebanese state's claim to sole authority can hold beyond the podium. At the UN General Assembly on 25 September, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam declared that the state alone speaks and negotiates for Lebanon, pairing Israeli withdrawal, the release of detainees and reconstruction with exclusive state control of weapons, and pressed for a continued international presence in the south once UNIFIL's final mandate expires on 31 December 2026. The European Union backed that line materially: on 23 September the Commission adopted €505 million for 2026-2027, and High Representative Kaja Kallas announced a new EU mission to advise and train the Lebanese Army. The same doctrine met direct resistance from the actors it is meant to constrain. On 24 September, President Masoud Pezeshkian answered Salam's call for non-interference by reaffirming the regional role of the "resistance", and on 25 September Hezbollah, through MP Hassan Fadlallah, accepted indirect negotiation only on terms that reject the government's framework. In the south, Israeli strikes ran through the week and widened on 26-27 September after Israel attributed an explosive drone to Hezbollah; at home, a new Banque du Liban circular, labour protests over living costs and an armed clash in Qab Elias marked the domestic strain. Read together, these were not separate files but one sequence: the state asserted its monopoly on decision abroad, secured European backing for it, and saw it contested within forty-eight hours by the external patron and the armed party whose parallel authority it is meant to end.

PART I | NEW YORK: STATE AUTHORITY AND THE POST-UNIFIL FILE

United Nations General Assembly diplomacy, 21-25 September 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

- Senator Jeanne Shaheen, 21 September - Salam opened his New York round with the U.S. senator, raising continued support for the Lebanese Army, the extension of state authority, exclusive state control of weapons, reconstruction, economic reform and a post-UNIFIL security arrangement. Shaheen raised the financial-gap law and IMF-linked reforms.
- Secretary-General António Guterres, 21 September - Salam called for a continued UN-backed international presence in southern Lebanon after UNIFIL to preserve monitoring, reporting and liaison functions, put the number of displaced at around 329,000, and called for a gradual shift from emergency relief to return, recovery and the restoration of essential services. His round continued on 22 September with King Abdullah II of Jordan and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.
- UN General Assembly, 25 September - Salam said the Lebanese state alone speaks and negotiates on behalf of Lebanon. He paired Israeli withdrawal, release of detainees and reconstruction with the extension of state authority and exclusive control of weapons, and called for a timetable and verification mechanism for the framework arrangements.
- Post-UNIFIL context - Security Council Resolution 2790, adopted on 28 August 2025, extended UNIFIL for a final time through 31 December 2026, after which operations cease and withdrawal is to be completed within one year. The Council requested options for implementing Resolution 1701 after the mission ends.
- Hezbollah and Amal, 25 September - Hezbollah MP Hassan Fadlallah said the two movements were not opposed to a political solution in the south and were open to indirect negotiations if they produced withdrawal, return and reconstruction, while rejecting the existing framework on its current terms.

ASSESSMENT

The General Assembly speech is the clearest statement to date of the government's doctrine: negotiation, withdrawal and reconstruction are prerogatives of the state, and exclusive control of weapons is presented not as a concession to Israel or Washington but as the condition of Lebanon's own sovereignty. Hezbollah's response defines the gap that doctrine must close. Fadlallah's acceptance of a "political solution" and indirect talks marks a rhetorical retreat from the language of open-ended armed resistance, yet by rejecting the government's framework on its current terms the party reserves for itself a veto over what the state may negotiate, and conditions its own disarmament on outcomes it alone defines. This is the dual-authority problem in its oldest form. Since the Cairo Agreement of 1969 first conceded to a non-state force the right to bear arms and decide on war from Lebanese soil, every attempt to restore the state's monopoly has foundered on the same claim: that an armed party may accept the state's diplomacy while retaining a veto over its outcome. Resolution 2790 now turns this political question into a deadline. Once UNIFIL's mandate ends on 31 December 2026, whatever monitoring and liaison function survives will rest on a Lebanese Army able to hold the south on its own authority. The question the week leaves open is therefore not whether Lebanon negotiates, but whether the state can negotiate with the authority it claims; the answer lies in disarmament, not in diplomatic language.

PART II | EU SUPPORT: RECOVERY, REFORM AND SECURITY

European package and recovery track, 23 September 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

- European Commission, 23 September - Adopted €505 million in financial support for Lebanon for 2026 and 2027, described as the second half of the €1 billion package announced in May 2024.
- Essential services - The package includes support for education, health, social protection and water, including assistance for vulnerable families and people with disabilities.
- Recovery and reform - Funding is intended to support economic recovery and reforms, institutional capacity, the private sector and communities affected by conflict and displacement.
- Security and borders - The Commission included security and border management among the package's principal areas of support.
- EU security mission - High Representative Kaja Kallas said a new EU mission was being prepared to advise and train Lebanon's armed forces to provide security across the country.
- Humanitarian assistance - A separate €100 million in EU humanitarian funding for Lebanon in 2026 sits outside the €505 million 2026-2027 tranche.
- Moving Beyond Crisis - Lebanon, the European Union and UNDP jointly launched a recovery approach arguing that livelihoods, essential services and institution-building should proceed alongside emergency humanitarian response rather than wait for the crisis to end.

ASSESSMENT

The EU package matters less for its size than for its architecture. By bundling services, recovery, reform, security and border management in one instrument, and pairing it with a dedicated mission to train the Lebanese Army, Brussels is investing directly in the institution meant to inherit UNIFIL's space and to exercise the state's monopoly on force. European support thus aligns with the doctrine Salam set out in New York: the state, not parallel structures, is both the recipient and the guarantor. The test is political, not financial. Funding and training strengthen the army only if the decision to deploy it with full authority follows; without that decision, external support builds capacity the state is not yet permitted to use.

PART III | SYRIA AND IRAN: THE STATE-TO-STATE TEST

Regional diplomacy, 23-24 September 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

- Syria, 23 September - President Joseph Aoun received a Syrian ministerial and economic delegation in Beirut and emphasized bilateral relations based on mutual respect, non-interference, and practical economic cooperation.
- Prime Minister Salam and President Ahmad al-Sharaa, 24 September - Met on the margins of the UN General Assembly and described the relationship as entering a new phase through official state channels.
- Bilateral files - The Lebanese-Syrian discussions included reviewing existing agreements and cooperation in electricity, railways, energy, and other cross-border economic links.
- Iran, 24 September - Salam told Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian that Lebanon sought a state-to-state relationship based on sovereignty, independence, non-interference, and common interests, and that Lebanon did not want to serve as an arena for regional conflicts or exchanges of messages.
- Iranian response, 24 September - In a meeting requested by the Iranian side, Pezeshkian reiterated the importance of the "resistance" in the region, beyond Lebanon alone, and did not commit to the non-interference principle Salam set out.
- Diplomatic representation - Salam asked Tehran to nominate a new ambassador to Lebanon, placing the relationship back within formal diplomatic channels.

ASSESSMENT

The Pezeshkian meeting was the week's clearest measure of the distance between the state-to-state principle and Iranian practice. Salam asked for sovereignty, non-interference and a new ambassador through normal channels; the Iranian president, in a meeting his own side requested, answered with the "resistance". The exchange confirms that Tehran still treats Lebanon as a front in a regional axis rather than as a sovereign counterpart, and that its relationship with Hezbollah, not with the Lebanese government, remains its operative channel. Syria offers the inverse picture. Since the fall of the Assad regime, Damascus has engaged Beirut through presidents, ministers and agreements rather than through security services and proxies, allowing the relationship to be conducted between two states for the first time in decades.

PART IV | THE SOUTH: A FULL WEEK OF MILITARY PRESSURE

Israeli military activity, 21-27 September 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

- Kfar Shuba and southern districts, 21 September - Israeli forces carried out dawn airstrikes on several areas in southern Lebanon, while an incursion was reported near Kfar Shuba under cover of machine-gun fire.
- Midweek pattern - Airstrikes, artillery fire and demolitions continued across southern districts between 22 and 25 September.
- Sojod and Jezzine heights, 26 September - Three Israeli strikes hit Sojod, with additional fire reported in the Jezzine heights; explosions were heard as far as Saida.
- Late 26 September - Israel said an explosive drone attributed to Hezbollah had been launched toward its forces at positions it holds inside southern Lebanon. Israel reported no casualties.
- 27 September escalation - Israeli airstrikes, artillery fire, machine-gun fire and explosions were reported across several southern localities during the night and into Sunday, with Israel describing the attacks as retaliation for the alleged drone incident.
- Mayfadoun-Shoukin road, 27 September - An Israeli Apache helicopter struck a building housing shops, as attacks continued across the Nabatieh, Marjayoun, Sour, Hasbaya and Bint Jbeil districts.

ASSESSMENT

The weekend escalation exposed the central contradiction of Lebanon's position. On 25 September the Prime Minister told the General Assembly that the state alone decides on war, peace and negotiation; by 26 September an explosive drone attributed to Hezbollah had supplied Israel with the justification for its widest strikes of the week across five southern districts. Whether or not the attribution is ultimately confirmed, the episode demonstrates that the capacity to trigger escalation still lies outside state institutions, and that its cost is borne by southern communities and by the credibility of Lebanon's diplomatic line. Israel's uninterrupted strikes and incursions since 21 September, for their part, undercut the withdrawal-and-verification framework Beirut is asking the international community to guarantee.

PART V | COST OF LIVING, FINANCIAL REGULATION AND INTERNAL SECURITY

Domestic conditions, 21-26 September 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

- Banque du Liban, 21 September - Issued Intermediate Circular 777 (Decision 13846) regulating electronic payment service providers.
- Social-policy response, 23 September - General Confederation of Lebanese Workers head Bechara al-Asmar requested a ministerial economic cell to address wages, transport allowances and the indicators used in wage negotiations. President Joseph Aoun backed convening the mechanism after Salam's return.
- North Lebanon, 26 September - Unionists, public- and private-sector employees and bus drivers held a warning sit-in in Tripoli over the cost of living and fuel-related transport burdens, calling for regular support to public-transport drivers.
- Qab Elias-Zahle, 21-22 September - An armed clash left several people injured. The Lebanese Army said it subsequently raided the area, arrested three alleged shooters, seized weapons and military ammunition, and opened an investigation under judicial supervision.

ASSESSMENT

The domestic file shows a state that is regulating and policing, but not yet reforming. Circular 777 extends Banque du Liban's oversight to electronic payments, a necessary step toward shrinking the cash economy on which both tax evasion and parallel financial networks rely, but it leaves untouched the depositor losses and the unresolved financial-gap law on which recovery depends. The Tripoli sit-in and the proposed ministerial cell show social pressure reaching the executive faster than structural reform can answer it. In Qab Elias, the army's swift raid, arrests, seizure of weapons and referral to the judiciary applied the correct model of state authority over arms. The contrast with the south, where the same principle remains contested, measures how selectively that authority is still exercised.

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