

MEIRSS LEBANON WEEKLY BRIEF

5 - 11 October 2026

ABSTRACT

The week of 5 - 11 October 2026 exposed a widening gap between Lebanon's efforts to restore state authority and the security conditions in which that authority must operate. Israeli attacks, demolitions and incursions continued across the south; a 9 October drone strike near Hawsh al-Sayyed Ali in Hermel wounded six people, while two men died on 11 October in separate incidents during the olive harvest near Yater and Froun. Health Ministry figures released on 10 October placed the cumulative toll since 2 March at 4,386 killed and 12,424 injured, not casualties from this week alone. A report on the first U.S.-backed pilot zone at Zawtar Gharbieh documented around 70 returned families amid devastated housing and absent basic services. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas visited Beirut on 8 October and discussed a planned European training mission, while 86 Lebanese MPs called for an extension or replacement of UNIFIL. Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem offered conditional cooperation over state control of arms. Reuters reported a disputed \$200 million Iranian transfer said to have occurred in September, and reports published 10 - 11 October concerning explosives seized at Dahr al-Baidar reignited the weapons debate. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam forecast a 6.4% contraction in 2026 and defended the draft 2027 budget. Separately, U.S. aviation restrictions on Lebanon were officially revoked in a determination published on 5 October; this does not itself restart direct flights.

This week's central test remains practical implementation: securing territory, restoring services and converting diplomacy into verifiable results.

PART I | THE FRAMEWORK, UNIFIL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SUPPORT

Lebanese diplomacy, parliamentary positioning, EU engagement, U.S. aviation and military capacity, 5-11 October 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

Lebanon's central external-security dispute remained the sequence linking Israeli withdrawal, Lebanese Army deployment and the state's monopoly on weapons. The pending termination of UNIFIL's mandate at the end of 2026 added a separate institutional deadline.

- Salam's position, 5 October – The prime minister called for precise deadlines under the June framework, arguing that withdrawal and disarmament should progress in parallel and according to reciprocity and gradualism. He stressed that extending state sovereignty was a pre-existing national commitment, not merely a concession sought by outside powers.
- Negotiations: timetable remains unsettled, 5-9 October – A 5 October morning brief presented 20 October in Florida as the next expected date. On 9 October, al-Jumhouria, cited by Naharnet, reported that no official date had been communicated and that postponement beyond the Israeli elections was possible. Accordingly, neither the timing nor a withdrawal calendar was settled by 11 October.
- Parliamentary initiative, 6 October – A cross-party group of 86 MPs submitted a legal study asking President Joseph Aoun and Speaker Nabih Berri to seek an extension of UNIFIL's mandate or an internationally legitimate alternative. The initiative argued that withdrawal without verified Israeli withdrawal could create a serious security vacuum.
- UNIFIL exposed, 7 October – UNIFIL said one of its positions near Kfar Shuba was struck by several rounds of small-arms fire, but reported no injuries and did not identify the source of the shots. The incident reinforced concern over peacekeeper exposure as the force approaches the end of its mandate.
- Kallas in Beirut, 8 October – EU High Representative Kaja Kallas met Aoun, Berri, Salam and Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji. The Lebanese side sought an international presence after UNIFIL, preferably under U.N. auspices. Kallas said the EU supported avoiding a security vacuum and welcomed the possibility of extending the U.N. mission.
- European advisory mission – Kallas said planning for a training and advisory mission for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces had been completed, with formal EU consideration expected on 12 October. The planned mission is not a replacement for UNIFIL and is not limited to southern Lebanon; it was not yet an established mission by the end of this reporting period.

- U.S. aviation restrictions lifted, 5-11 October – A U.S. presidential determination signed on 30 September was published in the Federal Register on 5 October, formally revoking four aviation-security restrictions dating to 1985-2007. President Aoun welcomed the step and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut described it on 11 October as progress toward direct U.S.-Lebanon flights. The legal change does not itself authorize an airline route, approve airport security procedures or confirm when services will resume.
- PEGASUS CEDAR, announced 7 October – The British Embassy confirmed on 7 October that British soldiers had begun a three-week joint exercise with the Lebanese Air Assault Regiment. Scheduled training covers reconnaissance, mortars, small-unit tactics and helicopter drills. U.S. and Italian personnel were also to participate, with other militaries observing.

ASSESSMENT

The diplomatic process has acquired two distinct clocks: the short-term negotiation track and the year-end deadline for UNIFIL. They should not be mistaken for a single plan. On the second, the 86-MP initiative and the EU's openness to extending the U.N. mission point toward the wrong answer. Renewing UNIFIL, or recreating it under another name, would not fill a security vacuum; it would preserve the arrangement that produced it. Since 1978, UNIFIL has coexisted with armed non-state control of the south, and since 2006 it has monitored, without enforcing, a Resolution 1701 that Hezbollah's rebuilt arsenal steadily hollowed out. An international force that records violations it cannot prevent offers every party cover: Hezbollah to keep its weapons, Israel to justify its strikes, and the Lebanese state to defer a decision that belongs to it alone. Extending that system would reproduce the same destructive dynamics that brought the south to its present devastation. The real alternative is not another mandate but the Lebanese Army as the sole armed authority in the south, backed by a verification mechanism tied to Israeli withdrawal. That is where the proposed EU training mission belongs: as support for the state's own monopoly on force, not as a substitute peacekeeping layer. The operational benchmark is therefore a reciprocal schedule, verifiable state control of territory and a credible mechanism for civilian protection. Reports of an unconfirmed 20 October negotiating date further underline that announced diplomatic timetables must not be confused with an agreed implementation schedule.

PART II | HEZBOLLAH: RHETORIC, FINANCING AND THE DAHR AL-BAIDAR FILE

Naim Qassem's speech, disputed Iran transfer and explosives investigation, 6-11 October 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

Debate over the state's exclusive authority over weapons moved simultaneously through political speech, financial reporting and criminal investigation. These are separate evidentiary tracks and should not be conflated.

- Qassem's statement, 6 October – Hezbollah Secretary-General Naim Qassem said his movement was prepared to cooperate on domestic matters, including the state's monopoly on arms, but rejected external dictates. He insisted that Israeli withdrawal must occur and said Hezbollah had no concessions to offer merely to induce a pullout.
- Iranian financial transfer reported, 7 October – Reuters reported that two people with direct knowledge said Iran had transferred \$200 million to Hezbollah in September for assistance to people displaced by the war. The report was published during this week, but the reported transfer occurred in the preceding month.
- Funding dispute and intended distribution – The sources described an initial plan for \$3,000 per family, prioritizing approximately 50,000 affected households, and claimed intermediaries took a 20% fee. A Hezbollah official acknowledged that some funds had been secured but did not identify their source. The U.S. State Department explicitly disputed that the claimed \$200 million was available.
- Dahr al-Baidar seizure, reported 10 – 11 October – Reports released on 10 October documented an Internal Security Forces seizure of explosives from a car heading from the Bekaa toward Beirut, with two detainees. A judicial source quoted by AFP on 11 October dated the stop to Thursday, 8 October, while L'Orient Today's first report described a Saturday seizure. The event therefore falls within this reporting week, but the precise operational date is disputed.
- Quantity, affiliation and destination contested – L'Orient Today cited a military estimate of around 300 kilograms and a judicial estimate of roughly 600 kilograms; a judicial source quoted by AFP described 250 kilograms each of TNT-type and C-4-type explosives (500 kilograms in total). Sources also disagreed about the detainees' alleged Hezbollah links, which Lebanese authorities had not independently confirmed. Their intended recipient and purpose remain unverified.
- Investigation remains open – The investigation was transferred to military authorities, and Justice Minister Adel Nassar vowed to pursue it. No public judicial finding establishing the intended use, ultimate recipients or a plot to assassinate anyone had been verified by the end of 11 October.

- Political reaction, 11 October – Politicians divided between calling for decisive action against non-state weapons, welcoming the enforcement of the law, and emphasizing the need to await investigative findings. The Amal Movement withheld judgment pending the investigation and Hezbollah's position.

ASSESSMENT

The speech, reported financing and explosives case point in different directions. Qassem's willingness to discuss the state's monopoly remains conditional and does not amount to a documented handover of weapons. The reported Iranian transfer, if substantiated, would provide a limited mechanism for Hezbollah to rebuild welfare ties with displaced communities, but the American denial prevents treating the sum as independently verified. Dahr al-Baidar is a concrete law-enforcement event, yet the quantity, organizational linkage and intended destination of the explosives remain contested. Speculation about assassinations would be unsound at this stage. Taken together, the files demonstrate how the monopoly-of-force debate is shifting from grand declarations toward testable questions: who controls weapons in transit, who funds recovery and what independent judicial evidence can establish.

PART III | THE ECONOMY AND THE 2027 BUDGET: FISCAL CAPACITY UNDER WAR CONDITIONS

Growth reversal, household costs, energy and contested appointments, 6-9 October 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

The government's fiscal policy had to absorb the consequences of war while addressing public-sector wage erosion and the rising cost of essential services. Its budget became both an economic and political test.

- 2026 contraction estimate, 8 October – Prime Minister Salam projected a 6.4% contraction in 2026, following what he described as 4.2% growth in 2025. These figures were presented by the government; the 2026 value is a forecast rather than a measured year-end outcome.
- 2027 budget envelope – Salam defended a draft budget of about \$6.9 billion, or roughly \$7 billion, approved the preceding week and sent to Parliament. He said the draft remained nominally balanced and did not impose new taxes, while acknowledging changes to certain fees.
- Public-sector pay and social support – The draft allocates about \$1.2 billion to correcting public-sector salaries. Salam announced a roughly 16% increase in the Health Ministry's allocation and \$70 million in state financing for the Aman assistance program; projected World Bank financing could raise its beneficiary base toward 150,000 families in 2027.

- Economic empowerment – The government described a \$20 million allocation to training, small enterprises, tools and productive equipment, targeting livelihoods alongside immediate relief.
- Tax enforcement – Salam said the Finance Ministry had notified 107 companies over unpaid value-added tax; additional files reportedly involved about \$200–250 million. Audits of 64 companies' profit-tax payments were also underway. These claims concern enforcement of existing liabilities, not newly legislated taxes.
- Electricity dispute, 6–9 October – Energy Minister Joe Saddi announced on 6 October that he would boycott Cabinet meetings over unresolved Electricité du Liban funding and electricity-supply issues. On 9 October, Naharnet cited informed sources saying resignation was under consideration; this was not an announced resignation. The dispute concerned unpaid government electricity liabilities and the means of increasing power supply without increasing household burdens.
- University leadership, 8 October – Cabinet renewed Bassam Badran' s appointment as Lebanese University president for another five years. The decision was politically contested in light of the Constitutional Council' s annulment of legislation that had sought to permit his reappointment.
- Trade connection, 6–8 October – Port authorities for Beirut and Tripoli signed their entry into the IMEC Ports Club during meetings in India. Membership is a port-cooperation initiative, not a binding guarantee of new transport routes or financing.

ASSESSMENT

The 6.4% forecast frames the central budget contradiction: government commitments to wages, healthcare and social assistance are rising just as economic output and household purchasing power face renewed pressure. A nominally balanced budget may help maintain monetary credibility, but it does not by itself generate adequate public services or reconstruction financing. The power-sector dispute demonstrates the politically difficult distribution of costs between the treasury, electricity provider, generators and consumers. Meanwhile, the Lebanese University appointment shows how institutional bargaining can eclipse rule-of-law concerns even when formal reform language is prominent. Membership in a new ports network is a constructive signal of commercial outreach, but its concrete value will depend on security, logistics and investment conditions that remain unresolved.

PART IV | RECOVERY. LOCAL SECURITY AND THE LIMITS OF THE PILOT ZONE

Zawtar Gharbieh, border enforcement and infrastructure access, 7-11 October 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

Beyond diplomacy, the ability of displaced residents to return and rebuild remains a direct test of Lebanese state legitimacy. Reports from the first pilot zone offered the most concrete evidence this week of the obstacles to implementation.

- **Zawtar Gharbieh after Israeli withdrawal** – A Reuters report published 8 October described the village after Israel’s July withdrawal. Approximately 70 families had returned, often to damaged properties, while an adjacent village, Zawtar Sharqieh, remained occupied and subject to demolition.
- **Basic services still absent** – The village mayor said electricity and running water were largely unavailable. The Council for the South had delivered 16 prefabricated homes, but many could not be inhabited without utilities. Service restoration had to bypass infrastructure routed through the neighboring occupied village.
- **No second pilot zone** – Reuters reported that no subsequent pilot zones had been agreed two months after the first withdrawal. The United States described the pilot process as the viable route forward, conditioned on Lebanese Army clearance operations and Hezbollah disarmament.
- **Agriculture under occupation** – Residents described dependence on a U.S.-led coordination mechanism for access to olive groves near Israeli positions, where the timing of permits threatens the harvest. Israeli surveillance drones and ground activities further constrain local mobility.
- **Zawtar damage continues, 9-10 October** – Israeli forces were reported to have uprooted trees and conducted bulldozing near a Lebanese Army position and near a village water reservoir, illustrating the exposure of the pilot zone itself to military activity.
- **Arsal border enforcement, 7 October, announced 8 October** – The Lebanese Army reported a clash with smugglers near Arsal and the seizure of five pickup trucks bringing approximately five tonnes of copper and tin plus tobacco into Lebanon. One suspect was arrested; the army reported no injuries.
- **Civilian protection and reconstruction** – The government’s previously announced tenders in Nabatieh remain relevant as implementation commitments, but this week offered no verified basis to claim that all construction was completed, hospitals restored or stable household return achieved.

ASSESSMENT

The pilot-zone experiment is the most revealing implementation test in this brief. Withdrawal from a village does not create a functioning civilian settlement when nearby territory remains occupied, utilities are severed, fields require negotiated access and unexploded ordnance continues to threaten daily activity. Municipal recovery is therefore not a secondary humanitarian objective; it is essential to converting territorial control into trusted authority. Border seizures demonstrate that Lebanese forces can enforce rules in discrete operations, but sustained state presence needs predictable safety and services. As long as practical return is blocked, formal agreements risk being judged by residents as procedural rather than transformative. The comparison to watch in the next brief is not simply the count of diplomatic meetings or pledges, but whether additional villages become safely habitable and whether public institutions can operate without interruption.

PART V | THE SOUTH: MILITARY PRESSURE, CIVILIAN EXPOSURE AND THE OLIVE HARVEST

Airstrikes, incursions, demolition, casualties and the northern edge of the occupied zones, 5-11 October 2026

DEVELOPMENTS

The framework agreement had not produced a halt to military activity. Israeli aircraft, artillery, drones and ground vehicles remained active across the Nabatieh, Marjayoun, Bint Jbeil, Sour and Hasbaya districts throughout the reporting period.

- 5 October: attacks resume – After a relatively quiet night, strikes hit Kfar Tibnit and Wadi Hujeir; shelling affected several border districts. Incendiary or phosphorus munitions were reported in Majdal Zoun, where a fire broke out. The precise munition type was reported by local correspondents, not independently established.
- 6 October: explosive injury and incursion – A device described as Israeli ordnance exploded in Shoukin near Nabatieh, injuring one person. Israeli vehicles and a bulldozer crossed an earth embankment near Kfar Shuba before withdrawing.
- 7 October: Haddatha and contested occupation horizon – Israeli armored vehicles entered the Haddatha area. An unnamed Israeli military source quoted by Sky News Arabia said Israeli forces could remain in Lebanon for years; this was a reported position from one source, not a formally announced withdrawal policy.
- 8 October: attacks along multiple sectors – Israeli strikes targeted Wadi Slouqi, Kfar Tibnit, Mansouri and Bani Hayan, while artillery and tank fire affected Houla, Mais al-Jabal and Nabatieh al-Fawqa.

- 9 October: Zawtar and the Hermel strike – Israeli forces uprooted trees near a Lebanese Army position in Zawtar Gharbieh. Near Hawsh al-Sayyed Ali in the Hermel district, an Israeli drone fired near a vehicle, injuring six people, according to local reporting; the vehicle reportedly escaped a direct hit. Israel claimed that it targeted an operative linked to Iran, an allegation not independently established by the Lebanese health figures.
- 10 October: widening pattern – Airstrikes were reported at Wadi Slouqi, Markaba, Tallousa and Kfar Tibnit, with drone strikes near Nabatieh al-Fawqa. Demolitions or large explosions took place in Houla and Taybeh. Shelling and gunfire also affected Mansouri, Beit Yahoun, Khiam and neighboring areas.
- 11 October: two deaths during the olive season – A retired Lebanese soldier was killed by Israeli artillery fire near Yater after going to his land for the harvest. In a separate incident in Froun, a man was killed by the explosion of an Israeli munition. Strikes were also reported in Mansouri, Tallousa and Kfar Tibnit.
- Health Ministry figures, 10 October – The cumulative toll announced for the conflict since 2 March was 4,386 killed and 12,424 wounded; since 8 October 2023, 8,953 killed and 30,660 wounded. These are cumulative figures, not casualties solely from this reporting week.

ASSESSMENT

The defining security feature of the week was the absence of a credible geographical distinction between occupied areas, villages designated for return and places residents must cross to cultivate land or obtain services. The two deaths on 11 October show how the olive harvest itself has become a civilian-risk event: one fatality followed direct fire, while the other arose from unexploded ordnance. These mechanisms are analytically distinct and should not be merged into a single strike count. The continued attacks complicate the Lebanese Army's field operations and weaken the practical credibility of incremental withdrawal. Daily bombardment and demolition make it difficult for the state to tell returning families that an area is genuinely stable, irrespective of the diplomatic architecture constructed around the framework.

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Prepared by the Middle East Institute for Research and Strategic Studies

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