

■ Report

THE  
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INITIATIVE

# A War Without a State

Lebanon's response to the 2024 Israeli war

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June 12, 2025



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## Introduction

On October 8, 2023, one day after the Aqsa Flood operation in Gaza, Hezbollah opened what it called a support front by firing missiles into the occupied Lebanese territory of Shebaa Farms. Israel responded with aggressive strikes along Lebanon's borders, igniting a series of escalating reprisals that would ultimately lead to a full-scale war nearly a year later. Although clashes between October 8, 2023, and September 22, 2024, were limited geographically, the country remained under the persistent threat of an all-out conflict. An Israeli intelligence attack on September 17, 2024, provided the final spark, triggering the war on September 23, 2024.

By the time the guns fell silent on November 27, 2024,<sup>1</sup> at least 3,823 people had been killed, more than 15,859 injured,<sup>2</sup> and 1.3 million others were forcibly displaced.<sup>3</sup> The war's impact reverberated across Lebanon's already fractured social and economic fabric. A World Bank assessment released in November 2024—prior to the war's end—estimated direct damages at \$3.4 billion, with broader economic losses reaching \$5.1 billion. The housing sector alone accounted for 82% of the destruction. Subsequent evaluations have placed the total damage closer to \$20 billion.<sup>4</sup> Already mired in a deep economic and financial crisis, Lebanon's real GDP contracted by 7.1% in 2024.<sup>5</sup> The mass displacement has further strained public services, worsened food insecurity, escalated social tensions, and caused environmental damage estimated at \$221 million.<sup>6</sup>

This report examines the Lebanese state's institutional response to the 2024 Israeli war, analyzing its crisis governance frameworks and institutional capacity. Specifically, it assesses governmental mobilization, coordination of essential public services, legislative and budgetary responsiveness, and diplomatic strategies employed to manage the escalating crisis.

The analysis draws on a desk review of publicly accessible information and official documents covering the period from October 8, 2023, to November 28, 2024. These include data from government portals, the National Emergency Plan, budget statements, legislative texts, and media coverage. A qualitative thematic analysis is employed to assess the government's responsiveness, legislative action, and institutional performance in crisis governance.<sup>7</sup>

Despite having nearly a year to prepare, the Lebanese government exhibited a striking lack of urgency and political will. It refused to declare a national emergency or general mobilization—steps that could have facilitated more effective governance and resource deployment. Instead of activating established disaster relief mechanisms, it formed a temporary National Emergency Committee (NEC) with limited legal authority, minimal funding, and insufficient technical capacity. The NEC's response strategy relied on outdated assumptions and failed to adapt to the realities of Lebanon's post-crisis context, resulting in widespread failures in shelter provision, healthcare, infrastructure protection, and environmental management.

<sup>1</sup> ReliefWeb. 2024. "Lebanon: War Crisis Update — November 2024," <https://bit.ly/3RRvjxm>.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Public Health. n.d. "Public Health Emergency Operation Center (PHEOC): العدوان الإسرائيلي," <http://bit.ly/3Yxjv76>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). 2024. "Displacement Figures in Lebanon," <https://bit.ly/44mw5df>.

<sup>4</sup> Bechara, S. 2024. "Economic Losses from War in Lebanon May Exceed \$20 Billion," L'Orient Today, <https://bit.ly/4d6b9t9>.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank. 2024. "New World Bank Report Assesses Impact of Conflict on Lebanon's Economy and Key Sectors," <https://bit.ly/42zqlKy>.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank. 2024. "Macro Poverty Outlook for Lebanon: April 2024 Update," <https://bit.ly/3F2upv2>.

<sup>7</sup> Covering the period from October 8, 2023, to November 28, 2024, data were sourced from official Lebanese government portals (e.g., the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Lebanese Army, relevant ministries, BdL, and Disaster Risk Management), the National Emergency Plan, official budgets (2024–2025), legislative texts in the Official Gazette, the Parliamentary Monitor by Legal Agenda, and news outlets. Materials were thematically categorized (finance, health, defense, etc.) and coded to differentiate administrative decrees, financial measures, and regulatory decisions, then analyzed qualitatively to assess governance, coordination, and legislative responsiveness against normative standards of a well-functioning state.

Legislative bodies, including Parliament and the Cabinet, failed to prioritize essential wartime legislation, focusing instead on routine administrative matters largely disconnected from the country's urgent needs. Budgetary decisions emphasized recurring expenditures over critical emergency response measures and relied heavily on financial transfers to cover gaps. Meanwhile, Banque du Liban (BdL) provided no direct financial relief to the government. Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and other emergency services remained severely underfunded and dependent on foreign aid. Fragmented communication efforts left citizens without consistent and reliable access to vital information.

Formal state institutions were systematically sidelined in favor of informal channels, significantly weakening the effectiveness of crisis response. Essential humanitarian services such as food and shelter were largely neglected by the government, forcing NGOs and individual initiatives to step in. The Lebanese Army and Internal Security Forces were notably absent in securing safe evacuation corridors, exemplifying the state's institutional incapacity.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, diplomacy bypassed formal institutions and was dominated by individual political figures, leading to fragmented decision-making and diminished national sovereignty.

Collectively, these failures demonstrate how Lebanon's ruling regime deliberately sidelined formal sovereign channels in its response to the war, relying instead on informal, personalized networks. This further undermined institutional sovereignty and deepened public distrust in the state.

The paper comprises three sections. The first section examines Lebanon's preparedness at the onset of hostilities, focusing on the formation of the crisis committee, strategic planning, and related financial arrangements. The second section analyzes state actions during the war, evaluating parliamentary and cabinet activities, budget allocations, and communication efforts, highlighting their limited effectiveness. The third section addresses key shortcomings, particularly inadequate support for the Lebanese Army and reliance on informal diplomatic channels, both of which weakened state sovereignty and compromised effective crisis management.

<sup>8</sup> "رحمة النزوح كشفت ثغرات خطة الطوارئ: إرشادات أولية كي نتفادى الكارثة مجدداً" Legal Agenda, 24 Sep 2024, <https://bit.ly/4lyUdCZ>.

## Institutional Failures: Weak Leadership and Flawed Strategy

This section examines the National Emergency Committee (NEC), Lebanon's central crisis-response body during the war, focusing on its legal mandate, strategy, and funding. The NEC's weak authority, limited experience, and reliance on centralized decision-making undermined its effectiveness and led to gaps in the National Emergency Plan (NEP). Insufficient funding further weakened its response, revealing systemic governance failures and underscoring the urgent need for legal reform and more inclusive crisis management.

### Gaps in the National Emergency Committee

The NEC was established under Decision 43/2023 on October 31, 2023, 24 days into the war, as a temporary body responsible for coordinating crisis management and mitigating the conflict's humanitarian impact.<sup>9</sup> It included representatives from various ministries and international organizations under the supervision of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office. Although the committee was initially slated to be led by Major General Staff Mohammad Al Mustafa, it ultimately fell under the leadership of the Minister of Environment, Nasser Yassin.<sup>10</sup>

Despite its intended role, the NEC faced three major shortcomings. First, its founding decree was never officially published in the Gazette; its authority was kept in tenuous legal standing. It operated without clearly defined roles and responsibilities, limiting its power and making it difficult to enforce decisions or mobilize relevant ministries. The NEC should have been granted explicit authority during the war, and the government should have declared a state of emergency or general mobilization so the NEC could leverage the country's public and private resources to meet urgent needs. For example, expropriation laws could have allowed government stewardship over critical facilities such as hospitals, bakeries, transport fleets, and power plants. Private educational institutions could have been required to admit displaced students, and reserves of essential commodities like fuel and wheat could have been appropriated to maintain national stability.

Second, the NEC lacked the necessary expertise and experience to manage the crisis. Unlike standing disaster-management agencies, it was newly formed with few human and financial resources. As a result, established institutions such as the Higher Relief Commission and Civil Defense, both of which had operational expertise and legal mandates, were sidelined.<sup>11</sup> Third, the NEC's operations were highly centralized under the Prime Minister's Office. While centralization can support high-level coordination, it often overlooks the pivotal role of local institutions and civil society. Municipalities, which have firsthand knowledge of local conditions and typically serve as primary responders, were relegated to secondary roles.

### Strategic Disconnect in the National Emergency Plan

The NEP, which was developed by the NEC, was designed as the guiding strategy for wartime response, yet its implementation was severely hindered by logistical shortcomings and designed in a way meant to generate donor support ultimately failing to address the evolving realities of the war.

<sup>9</sup> Saghie, N. and L. Ayyoub. 2024. "خطة طوارئ وطنية ليست كذلك (2): تقييم 'خطة الطوارئ' على ضوء التوجهات العامة," Legal Agenda, <http://bit.ly/4i7G4aC>.

<sup>10</sup> Presidency of the Council of Ministers. n.d. "National Emergency Committee Membership List," <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=24815>.

<sup>11</sup> Saghie, N. and L. Ayyoub. 2024. "خطة طوارئ وطنية ليست كذلك (1)," Legal Agenda, <https://bit.ly/3Zbrarq>.

Strategically, the NEP relied on outdated assumptions from the 2006 war,<sup>12</sup> ignoring vastly different domestic conditions in 2024. It underestimated the scale and speed of displacement by assuming a limited and gradual process. The NEP outlined ten sectors—health and medical services, shelter, food security, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), basic assistance, protection, social stability, logistics and equipment, energy and water resources, and education—but these were only minimally addressed. Consequently, the government was unprepared for mass evacuations and sheltering. Overreliance on international organizations further reduced Lebanon's sovereign capacity and caused additional delays and inconsistencies. These weaknesses produced operational breakdowns in four key areas, detailed below:

### Shelter and Housing

The NEP relied primarily on public schools without verifying their operational status or readiness.<sup>13</sup> Many emergency shelters lacked water, sanitation, or electricity. Poor communication about shelter locations resulted in overcrowding at some sites and underuse at others. Rising rents and landlord exploitation also burdened displaced families seeking private housing, exacerbating insecurity.<sup>14</sup>

### Health and Medical Services

Plans to deploy field hospitals and stockpile medical supplies were not fully realized, leaving the health sector overwhelmed.<sup>15</sup> Vulnerable groups, including those with chronic illnesses, disabilities, and mental health needs, received inadequate care.<sup>16</sup> Heavy reliance on international aid and volunteers led to further delays and inconsistencies in healthcare delivery.

### Environmental and Agricultural Impact

The NEP did not address environmental damage such as farmland burning and pollution from toxic munitions. Farmers received no guidance on damage mitigation or compensation, jeopardizing both livelihoods and food security.<sup>17</sup> Environmental harm was neither systematically assessed nor integrated into recovery planning.

### Infrastructure and Logistics

The plan offered insufficient protection for critical infrastructure including energy, transport, and communications. Proposals to establish a 45-day fuel reserve were poorly executed.<sup>18</sup> Even key transport routes were not safeguarded, and no robust backup systems were created.<sup>19</sup>

The NEP also failed to account for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly, and non-Lebanese residents. This omission resulted in unequal access to support services, compromising the rights and dignity of at-risk populations.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Energy and Water. 2023. "National Emergency Plan 2023," <https://bit.ly/43jxX5t>.

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF. 2024. "Lebanon Humanitarian Flash Update No. 4 – 27 September 2024," <https://bit.ly/4m5dd8Q>.

<sup>14</sup> Blominvest Bank. 2024. "Humanitarian, Economic, and Social Effects of War on Lebanon," <https://bit.ly/434d9Oe.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> World Health Organization. 2024. "Lebanon: A Conflict Particularly Destructive to Health Care," <https://bit.ly/42Ni14L>.

<sup>16</sup> ReliefWeb. 2024. "Elderly People in Lebanon Left Without Medicine, Food, or Fuel as Winter Approaches and Bombing Continues," <https://bit.ly/42MxHMg>.

<sup>17</sup> American University of Beirut. 2024. "The 2024 Israeli War on Lebanon: A Devastating Blow to Agriculture and the Environment," AUB AgHive, <https://bit.ly/4jDPJ9n>.

<sup>18</sup> Saghie, N. and L. Ayyoub. 2024. "تقييم 'خطة الطوارئ' على ضوء التوجهات العامة," Legal Agenda, <http://bit.ly/4i7G4aC>.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Development Program. 2024. "Rapid Appraisal: Lebanon 2024," <https://shorturl.at/Gr4Io.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> "عبد الخالق، ي. 2023. 'الخطة الاستباقية لمواجهة أي حرب مقبلة: متى تعتبر الدولة أننا في حالة حرب؟' Public Works, <https://shorturl.at/koFGC>.

### Financial Constraints and Response Limitations

Financial constraints posed a critical barrier to implementing the NEP. The plan was introduced without dedicated funding, and the 2024 national budget included no resources for it. Minister Nasser Yassine estimated that a controlled conflict with 250,000 displaced individuals would require \$50 million per month, whereas an uncontrolled conflict with one million or more displaced would necessitate the full \$100 million per month. By November, Minister Yassine raised this projection to approximately \$250 million, reflecting the true scope of the crisis.<sup>21</sup> International aid promises were only partly fulfilled, with \$112 million (14%) of the total humanitarian support delivered.<sup>22</sup>

## State Response: Reactive Governance and Institutional Paralysis

This section reviews how Lebanon's political institutions responded to the crisis following the NEC's assessment. It analyzes the frequency of parliamentary and cabinet meetings, legislative activities, agenda priorities, ministerial actions, government spending, and communication. The findings show that parliamentary sessions were infrequent and produced no significant legislation to address the crisis. Cabinet meetings blended urgent relief measures with routine administrative tasks, resulting in fragmented and ineffective responses, compounded by opaque ministerial actions. The state budget remained disconnected from immediate realities and relied heavily on financial transfers. Meanwhile, BdL resources were channeled primarily to the banking sector to compensate depositors rather than to government institutions struggling with urgent public needs. Government communication with citizens was largely absent or aimed at international donors. Taken together, these issues reflect the government's broader inability to adapt effectively to escalating violence.

### Institutional Inertia and Political Inaction

This sub-section examines how parliament, the cabinet, and ministries responded to the war. Despite the growing urgency of war, institutional performance fell significantly short. A review of these political institution's legislation, and official agendas from October 8, 2023, to November 28, 2024, reveals minimal engagement with wartime realities. Only 2% of enacted texts during this period were related to the conflict, underscoring a profound disconnect between institutional priorities and the demands of wartime governance.

### Parliament Failure

Parliament convened only five times after October 8, 2023,<sup>23</sup> and a sixth session scheduled for October 22 was canceled due to a lack of quorum.<sup>24</sup> Of these sessions, two addressed legislation, one dealt with the national budget, and two were for committee elections.<sup>25</sup> In total, thirteen laws were enacted (Table 1), none of which were directly related to the war. For example, on December 22, 2023, parliament approved a law on managing a sovereign wealth fund despite Lebanon having yet to discover any oil field in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although municipal elections were postponed, this marked the third time this step was taken and was not solely attributable to the war. Notably, the last law signed by parliament was on April 26, 2024, five months before the war intensified omitting any war relevancy.

Parliament not only failed to convene frequently enough to pass urgent legislation, but it also repeatedly omitted war-related topics from its session agendas.<sup>26</sup> A review of all five sessions shows that, aside from the laws discussed and passed (Table 1), even unratified proposals focused on issues unrelated to the war, such as annulling the extension of the retirement age for Directors General in the security forces and deferring the discharge of general officers in the army.

<sup>21</sup> El Nashra. 2023. "Yassine: The State Needs Around \$250 Million Monthly to Manage the Displacement Crisis," 7 Nov 2023, <https://bit.ly/42d4RnU>.

<sup>22</sup> L'Orient-Le Jour. 2024. "Lebanon Receives 14 % of Pledged Humanitarian Aid From Paris Conference," 13 Dec 2024, <https://shorturl.at/vUELi>.

<sup>23</sup> As per the Parliamentary Monitor by Legal Agenda, parliament sessions were held as follows: the election of permanent committee members on October 17, 2023, a legislative session on December 14, 2023, a budget discussion session on January 24, 2024, another legislative session on April 25, 2024, and a general discussion session on May 15, 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor. 2024. "جلسة انتخاب أعضاء هيئة مكتب المجلس," <https://www.lapoleb.com/event-plenary/single/2273>.

<sup>25</sup> LAU Pôle d'Études Libanaises. n.d. "Event Plenary List," <https://www.lapoleb.com/event-plenary/list>.

<sup>26</sup> Lebanese Parliamentary Monitor. n.d. "List of Plenary Sessions Agendas," <https://www.lapoleb.com/event-plenary/list>.



Table 1: Laws passed by parliament during war

Law Number	Date Signed	Title/Description
313	December 21, 2023	Approval of Loan Agreement (1061) with Kuwait Fund for Batroun Wastewater Project
314	December 21, 2023	Approval of Loan Agreement with European Investment Bank (Roads and Employment Project)
315	December 21, 2023	Approval of Agreement on Legal Status of Int'l Red Cross and Red Crescent Federation
316	December 21, 2023	Approval of World Bank Loan for Emergency Social Safety Net (COVID-19 Response)
317	December 21, 2023	Extension of Retirement Age for Army Commander and Security/Military Leaders
318	December 22, 2023	Regulation of Distributed Renewable Energy Production
319	December 22, 2023	Amendment of Social Security Provisions; Establishment of Retirement and Social Protection System
320	December 22, 2023	Legislation related to the Lebanese Sovereign Fund
321	December 22, 2023	Amendment of Article 73 (Formal Pleas) of Criminal Procedure Code (Law No. 328/2001)
322	December 22, 2023	Clinical Pharmacy Law
323	December 22, 2023	Amendment of Social Security Law Provisions (Women and Children)
324	February 12, 2024	Approval of the 2024 Budget
325	April 26, 2024	Extension of Municipal and Local Councils' Mandates until May 31, 2025
326	April 26, 2024	Determination of Applicable Law for Confirmed Civil Defense Volunteers (per Laws 289/2014 and 59/2017)

Source: Official Gazette

Cabinet Missteps

The cabinet met 26 times between October 8, 2023, and November 28, 2024, with six meetings occurring between September 17, 2024, and November 6, 2024.<sup>27</sup> During this period, the government issued 1,813 decrees and decisions, of which only 32 were related to the war. These war-related decrees largely reinforced routine state regulations, including 20 on financial transfers (Annex 1) and 11 concerning donor contributions. The only new measure introduced allowed special exams for students unable to attend classes due to security concerns.

Aside from one Lebanese donation of medical equipment, all documented support from financial aid (Saudi Arabia's King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center) to medical and food supplies (Bangladesh, UN agencies, Turkey, Iraq, and France), originated from international donors (Table 2). While the government approved and published these contributions within the required 7–10-day window, wartime delays still hindered swift distribution. Historically, Lebanon has expedited legislative publication within 2–3 days when required, but that urgency was lacking in the midst of this war-period.

Table 2: Foreign and domestic aid contributions to Lebanon (2024)

Date	Donor	Recipient	Type of Contribution
June 6, 2024	Lebanese Association for Health and Social Care	Ministry of Public Health - Public Hospitals	In-kind donation for public hospitals
June 27, 2024	King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center	Higher Relief Commission	Financial donation for development purposes
October 3, 2024	UNFPA Lebanon	Ministry of Public Health	Medical equipment and medicine
October 3, 2024	UNFPA Lebanon	Ministry of Public Health	Medical equipment and medicine
October 3, 2024	UNFPA Lebanon	Ministry of Public Health	Food supplements and medicine
October 3, 2024	Iraq	Ministry of Public Health	Medical equipment and medicine
October 7, 2024	Bangladesh	Ministry of Public Health	Medicine
October 10, 2024	Iraq	Ministry of Public Health	Medical equipment and medicine
October 10, 2024	World Health Organization	Ministry of Public Health	Medical equipment and medicine
October 10, 2024	Turkey	Ministry of Public Health	Medical equipment and medicine
November 14, 2024	France	Lebanese Government	Humanitarian aid

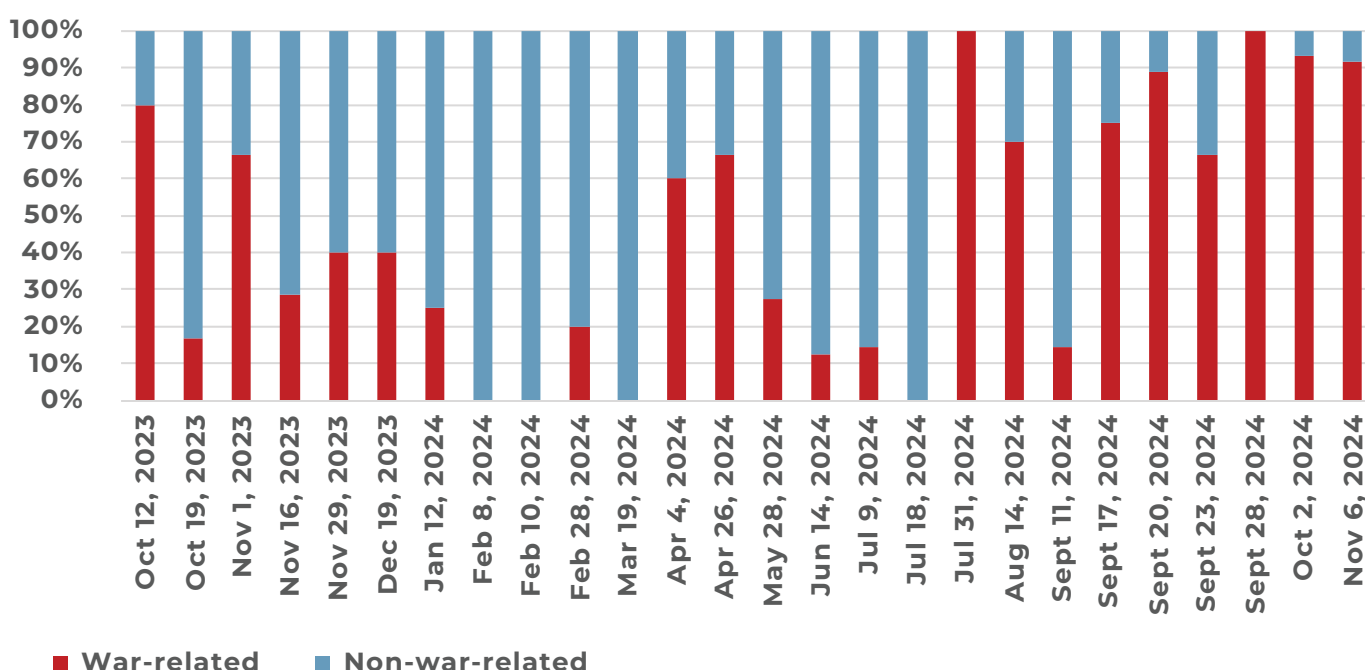
Source: Official Gazette

<sup>27</sup> Presidency of the Council of Ministers. n.d. "Cabinet Meeting Calendar," <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/listingandcalendarnew.aspx?pageid=28>.

During cabinet sessions, routine items such as the 2025 national budget were discussed alongside urgent matters, raising doubts about whether government strategies aligned with the needs of war-affected communities. As shown in Figure 1, from October 12, 2023, to September 11, 2024, only 48 out of 132 cabinet agenda items (36%) were war-related, even as hostilities escalated. The majority of discussions (64%) focused on unrelated topics. Although the cabinet's agenda shifted between September 17 and November 6, 2024, with 54 out of 62 items (87%) addressing war-related issues, this came too late. Even at the height of the crisis, the cabinet approved the 2025 draft budget on September 23 without incorporating measures for wartime realities or displacement needs.

Government decisions affecting displaced populations also lagged behind. As public housing options became insufficient, many families sought refuge in vacant private properties. Instead of implementing emergency housing solutions, the government used security forces to evict occupants on October 2, 2024. Proposals to repurpose large venues such as Beirut Sports City emerged only in the war's final week and were carried out not by the state, but by Banin Charity Association, which provided shelter for only 800 people.<sup>28</sup> This sequence of events underscores the government's reactive stance, driven by visible crises rather than proactive planning.

**Figure 1: Distribution of war-related and non-war-related topics in cabinet sessions (Pre- and Post-September 17, 2024)**



■ War-related ■ Non-war-related

Note: The data for this analysis was sourced from the meeting minutes of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, covering the period from October 8, 2023 to November 28, 2024. Each agenda item discussed during these cabinet sessions was classified as either war-related or non-war-related. War-related discussions encompassed relief efforts, deliberations on the national emergency plan, and references to UNSC Resolution 1701 (a resolution that ended the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006). In contrast, non-war-related topics addressed matters beyond the immediate conflict, including congratulatory messages, discussions on Syrian refugees, education policies, and deliberations on the 2025 national budget. The Y-axis of the graph represents the number of topics discussed per session, with war-related points displayed in blue and non-war-related points in red, illustrating the shifting focus of cabinet discussions over time.

<sup>28</sup> Banin Charity Association. 2024. "أفقرية بنين النموذجية..." [Facebook video], 18 Mar 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/banin.lb/videos/1193962725032710/>.

### Ministerial Transparency Gaps

Although some official decisions are published in the national gazette, certain ministries have issued directives on their websites that are not reflected in the official record. This practice raises concerns about public accessibility and accountability, as key decisions issued outside the gazette may lack legal clarity. Moreover, some ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, introduced measures for managing displaced students that were omitted from the National Emergency Plan. These gaps highlight potential coordination failures during a crisis.

### Ministry of Public Health

Facing a surge in casualties, the ministry suspended non-urgent medical procedures to free up capacity for war-related injuries. It also issued guidelines for handling donated medical supplies and established specialized clinics for long-term care. Additionally, it developed a healthcare strategy to maintain essential services for displaced communities.

### Ministry of Education and Higher Education

To accommodate large-scale displacement, the ministry created regulations for enrolling displaced students into public schools, including those from closed private schools or shelters. Private institutions were allowed to adopt distance or blended learning under an emergency committee's oversight. The Lebanese University was suspended, while private universities set their own timelines and modes of instruction.

### Ministry of Social Affairs

The ministry distributed financial aid to vulnerable families enrolled in national support programs and deployed personnel to assist the displaced. Collaborations with organizations such as SOS and Chrétiens d'Orient, as well as with various hospitals, allowed for mobile clinics in shelters. Further partnerships with institutions like Hôtel-Dieu improved healthcare access for displaced populations.

While these measures are timely and address immediate needs in the absence of a unified policy framework, such ad hoc responses risk remaining fragmented and insufficient to support long-term recovery and institutional resilience.

### Financial Mismanagement and Insufficient Government Spending

Although cabinet meetings and parliamentary sessions are crucial for wartime decision-making, this sub-section focuses on the government's financial allocations over the period. It examines budgetary developments from 2023 to 2025, particularly in institutions central to the wartime response, as well as government financial transfers and allocations by BdL. The findings reveal that the budget prioritized salaries and routine expenditures over strengthening wartime capacities, with financial transfers mostly used to cover budget gaps. Meanwhile, BdL allowed depositors greater access to cash in an effort to ease pressure on banks, but this did not provide direct financial support to government institutions.

### 2024-2025 Budget allocations

When parliament approved the 2024 budget on January 26, 2024—three months after hostilities began, six institutions received budget increases, while one had its budget reduced. Rather than demonstrating a coherent wartime strategy, these changes reflected a reactive approach to public finance, heavily dependent on financial transfers for bridging gaps in underfunded or misallocated resources. The 2024 budget rose by \$1.27 billion compared to 2023, with \$41.8 million disbursed through 20 financial transfers. Emphasis remained on operational expenditures, particularly salaries and basic services, while institutional development, strategic capabilities, and structural improvements were largely overlooked.

The Ministry of Public Health received the largest increase of \$366.3 million, mainly covering operational costs, and received the highest share of financial transfers at \$25.5 million (61% of the total). These funds supported medical supplies for public and private hospitals, notably Rafic Hariri and Baabda Governmental Hospitals, addressing urgent needs but not long-term health sector reform. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) followed with an increase of \$346.8 million, but no financial transfers. This allocation went entirely toward salaries, with no investment in training or weapons procurement despite the ongoing conflict.

In contrast, the High Relief Commission, a central agency for humanitarian response, endured a 64% budget cut compared to 2023. Although \$4.1 million in financial transfers were allocated to mitigate this reduction, the reliance on post-hoc compensation reveals concerning government priorities during a national emergency.

As for the 2025 budget approved by the cabinet on September 23, 2024, the same day the war escalated, it introduced only modest changes and did not correct the strategic weaknesses evident in 2024. The LAF again received a significant increase of \$158.3 million, solely for salaries. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Health faced a 6% cut (\$27.3 million), driven by a 23% drop in operational spending, suggesting short-term austerity rather than a long-range health sector strategy. By contrast, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities received an additional \$105.9 million, directed partly to the Bekaa and South governorates, which were severely affected by conflict. Although this indicates some responsiveness to geographical vulnerabilities, it remains limited in scale and delayed in timing.

Overall, the 2024 and 2025 budgets reflected a crisis-driven approach dominated by salary payments and basic operations, with insufficient investment in critical sectors. Heavy reliance on financial transfers to fix resource misallocations also highlights the absence of proactive, need-based budget planning during a time of intensifying conflict.

### Misused BdL Funds

BdL allocated \$220 million in both October and November 2024, allowing depositors to triple their usual withdrawal limits under Circulars 158 and 166.<sup>29</sup> While this move offered a vital lifeline for households struggling to access funds, it indirectly shielded banks from accountability. By injecting liquidity, BdL reduced the pressure on banks to implement reforms or recapitalize, effectively protecting banking elites from legal or financial repercussions tied to their mismanagement.

Meanwhile, as of September 30, 2024, \$6 billion in BdL's public sector deposits remained largely untouched for government spending.<sup>30</sup> These funds were not directed toward urgent relief, such as the \$400 million needed for essentials like mattresses, water, and electricity in shelters.<sup>31</sup> The acting governor demanded a law to sanction any lending to the state even under extreme circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

### Fragmented and Selective Communication

Effective communication is crucial during wartime to maintain public order, foster unity, and provide critical updates. However, Lebanon's state institutions demonstrated major communication failures. Agencies tasked with public outreach under the NEP focused more on bureaucratic procedures than on delivering timely, transparent, and strategic information. The following examples illustrate how key institutions fell short:

#### Ministry of Information

Responsible for circulating verified information, announcing urgent needs, coordinating media, and countering misinformation, the ministry published 65 posts since September 23. Only 24 were war-related, while 31 highlighted ministerial travel or events, and 18 duplicated Ministry of Public Health updates.<sup>33</sup>

#### Prime Minister

Issued a single press release expressing regret about the government's limited efforts and appealing for foreign aid.<sup>34</sup>

#### Council of Ministers

Released 28 memoranda and circulars, none of which referenced the war.<sup>35</sup>

#### Disaster Risk Management

Last updated its website in 2021 for COVID-19, providing no new information relevant to the current conflict.<sup>36</sup>

#### Army

Posted 79 briefings since September 17. Only one addressed United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701,<sup>37</sup> and another explained troop redeployment, emphasizing repositioning rather than retreat.<sup>38</sup> The remaining announcements covered routine tasks like detonating unexploded ordnance or arresting criminals, offering little insight into broader wartime strategy.

<sup>29</sup> Blominvest Bank. 2024. "Lebanese Central Bank Amends Circulars 166 and 147," <https://shorturl.at/sJZO5>.

<sup>30</sup> Banque du Liban. 2024. "Interim Balance Sheet – 30 September 2024," <https://shorturl.at/hvbnr.xlsx>.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations. 2024. "UN News Centre: Lebanon Emergency Appeal," <https://news.un.org/en/story/1155186/10/2024>.

<sup>32</sup> Saghie, N. and L. Ayyoub. الوطنية العريضة لخطة الطوارئ: 2024," Legal Agenda, <http://bit.ly/4i7G4aC>.

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Information. n.d. "Latest News," <https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/en/category/latest-news>.

<sup>34</sup> MTV Lebanon. 5 "، 1701 موافق علي تطبيق 1701"، 2024 Oct 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/trz82s8u>.

<sup>35</sup> Presidency of the Council of Ministers. n.d. "الأخبار حسب التاريخ"، <http://shorturl.at/c0ACC>.

<sup>36</sup> Presidency of the Council of Ministers. n.d. "Disaster Risk Management Unit," <http://drm.pcm.gov.lb/>.

<sup>37</sup> Alwakeel News. 2 "، 1701 التزامه بالقرار 1701"، 2024 Oct 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/ynna5sy3>.

<sup>38</sup> CNN Arabic. 2024. "Lebanese Army Responds to News of Withdrawal," 1 Oct 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/33vm9b6h>.

Although the government largely failed to communicate effectively with its citizens during the war, it actively disseminated data, damage assessments, and humanitarian needs to international audiences. This selective approach underscores Lebanon's prioritization of donor interests over those of its own population, reflecting the state's heavy reliance on foreign financial support, particularly in times of crisis.

This dependency became evident as Minister Nasser Yassin repeatedly appealed to the international community for aid. For instance, Prime Minister Mikati explicitly announced plans to seek donor assistance through the United Nations, anticipating more than \$450 million to address immediate humanitarian needs caused by mass displacement resulting from Israel's aerial campaign.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, the Lebanese government's selective communication approach during the war not only compromised public trust but also highlighted a troubling prioritization of international donor relations over domestic citizen engagement.

### Undermining Sovereignty: Institutional Bypass in Wartime Governance

Lebanon's wartime landscape has exposed critical failures of the state, particularly its inability to strengthen national defense and maintain unified diplomatic channels. Diplomacy has been dominated by sectarian power brokers, sidelining official institutions and weakening national sovereignty. The following sections examine these shortcomings and highlight the urgent need to bolster both security and foreign policy. Meanwhile, the government's inadequate support for the LAF has left it underfunded and dependent on foreign aid, with Civil Defense similarly overlooked.

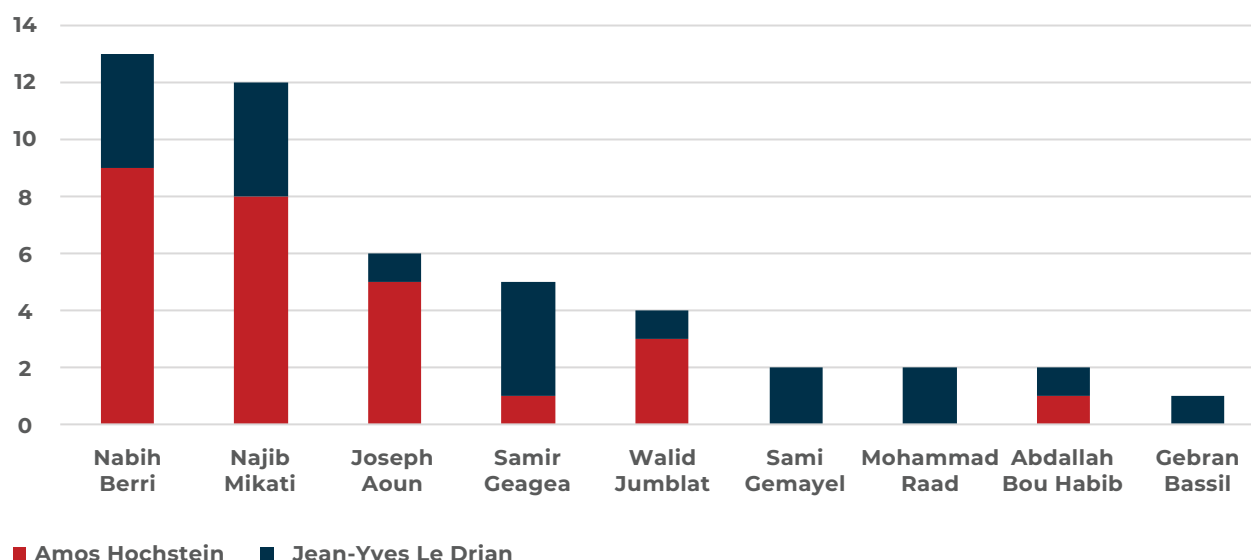
#### Informal Governance and Diplomatic Bypass

Under Lebanon's constitutional framework, diplomacy is formally managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the prime minister, especially in the absence of a president. During the war, however, foreign engagement largely revolved around individual power brokers tied to sectarian political blocs rather than official state institutions. Envoys frequently bypassed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meeting directly with figures such as Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Army Commander Joseph Aoun. This dynamic weakens Lebanon's sovereignty by aligning key decisions with partisan or sectarian interests instead of promoting a unified national stance.

The dominance of personal channels in diplomacy is evident in the visits of U.S. mediator Amos Hochstein and French presidential envoy Jean-Yves Le Drian. Speaker Nabih Berri played a central role in foreign policy and ceasefire negotiations, emerging as the primary point of contact for international mediators. He received 13 visits in total, nine from Hochstein and four from Le Drian, reflecting his strong influence in diplomatic affairs.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, army commander Joseph Aoun also met frequently with both envoys to address security concerns. In contrast, Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces party, held meetings with these envoys despite having no formal institutional role, illustrating how unofficial political actors play a significant part in Lebanon's diplomacy. Former Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib had only one meeting with each envoy, revealing a pattern where prominent military and political figures overshadow formal diplomatic institutions.

<sup>39</sup> The Guardian. 2024. "Lebanon Appeals for Humanitarian Funds Amid Displacement," 30 Sep 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mudsy3pa>.

<sup>40</sup> Gebeily, M. and T. Azhari. 2024. "Lebanon's Berri Reprises Key Mediator Role in Ceasefire Deal," Reuters, 27 Nov 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/33vm9b6h>.

**Figure 2: Meetings of Amos Hochstein and Jean-Yves Le Drian with Lebanese political figures**

Source: El Nashra News

Similarly, U.S. official Barbara Leaf met with Nabih Berri, Najib Mikati, and Joseph Aoun, again bypassing the Foreign Ministry. Other foreign envoys, including Jean-Noël Barrot (French Foreign Minister),<sup>41</sup> Ali Larijani (former speaker of the Iranian Parliament),<sup>42</sup> and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni,<sup>43</sup> also held talks primarily with Berri and Mikati, offering only sporadic engagement with formal institutions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs found its role superseded by powerful political figures pursuing their own strategic objectives. This pattern of person-to-person diplomacy sidelines formal channels and promotes sectarian or partisan agendas at the expense of a cohesive national policy. It erodes government authority and exposes Lebanon to deeper external influence, as personal or party interests overshadow a unified state-led diplomatic front.

### Weaknesses in Defense Preparedness

The government's decision to withdraw the army from the border, anticipating a ground invasion,<sup>44</sup> points to deeper systemic issues. The LAF appear neither adequately funded nor strategically engaged in the war. Although the cabinet allocated \$1.3 million to recruit 1,500 soldiers,<sup>45</sup> this allocation seems misaligned with the LAF's actual needs, given its persistent underfunding and reliance on foreign assistance.

For example, the LAF's viability continues to depend on contributions such as Qatar's \$20 million in cash and \$15 million in fuel, which help cover personnel expenses but do little to enhance long-term capabilities. Civil Defense, another critical responder, has received two financial transfers (\$1.3 million for salaries and \$674,000 for equipment) but still lacks the infrastructure necessary for an effective emergency response. These gaps underscore the absence of a coherent

<sup>41</sup> L'Orient-Le Jour. 2024. "French Foreign Minister Meets With Lebanese Officials," 1 Oct 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/26khzpmnd>.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Monitor. 2024. "Top Iran Adviser in Beirut to Show Support for Lebanon, Hezbollah," 12 Nov 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/msy75dm8>.

<sup>43</sup> Al Arabiya English. 2024. "Italian PM Visits Lebanon After UNIFIL Strikes," 18 Oct 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3myehkrp>.

<sup>44</sup> Reuters. 2024. "Apartment Building in Beirut Hit as Israel Widens Air Campaign," 29 Sep 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/bsbtctxf>.

<sup>45</sup> L'Orient-Le Jour. 2024. "Cabinet Meeting: Financing Recruitment of 1,500 Soldiers on Agenda," 30 Sep 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mr45f9uy>.



**Conclusion** The war that erupted in Lebanon in late September 2024 represented a critical test of the state's preparedness and capacity to respond effectively to national crises. This analysis has shown that the Lebanese government's response was marked by severe institutional inadequacies, lack of foresight, and systemic governance failures. The establishment of the NEC without clear legal authority, adequate funding, or technical expertise highlighted the government's reliance on improvised, centralized responses rather than established disaster-management frameworks. Similarly, the NEP was disconnected from realities on the ground, neglecting critical areas such as shelter, healthcare, infrastructure protection, and environmental management.

Political institutions demonstrated a profound disconnect from wartime necessities, exemplified by Parliament's minimal legislative activity related to the war and the Cabinet's preoccupation with routine matters at the expense of urgent wartime priorities. Financial allocations during the conflict prioritized routine expenditures over essential investments in crisis response capabilities, exacerbating reliance on ad-hoc financial transfers and foreign aid. Furthermore, fragmented and ineffective communication deepened public mistrust, while informal diplomatic channels dominated by sectarian leaders undermined national sovereignty and the state's institutional legitimacy.

Ultimately, these shortcomings were not simply isolated failures but symptoms of a deeper structural crisis within Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system, characterized by fragmented governance, the dominance of informal networks, and entrenched interests superseding national priorities. Addressing these fundamental flaws requires comprehensive institutional reform to rebuild state sovereignty and effectiveness. Without transformative change, Lebanon risks remaining vulnerable and inadequately prepared to face future threats, irrespective of their scale.

## Annex 1

### Government financial transfers and disbursements in wartime

Recipient	Purpose	Amount (\$)
Private and Public Hospitals	Employee salaries	11,860,047
Ministry of Public Health	Medical supplies and necessities for private and public hospitals	11,235,955
Council of the South	Assistance for displaced and injured individuals	5,617,978
South Governorate	Aid for displaced individuals	2,247,191
Rafic Hariri Governmental Hospital	Procurement of medical necessities	2,247,191
Higher Relief Commission	Continued funding for the National Emergency Plan	2,247,191
Higher Relief Council	Funding measures for the National Emergency Plan	1,685,393
Ministry of Interior and Municipalities	Compensation through salaries	1,334,090
Council of the South	Additional compensation for the descendants of martyrs from the Israeli aggression after October 7	1,051,685
General Directorate of Civil Defense	Provision of essential supplies and equipment for southern borders	672,472
Ministry of Interior and Municipalities	Financial compensation for governorates based on the number of displaced individuals	561,798
Council of the South	Payment of school grants for South Council employees for the 2023-2024 academic year	260,674
Council of the South	Compensation through salaries	255,291
Baabda Governmental hospital	Procurement of medical equipment	224,719
General Directorate for Social Affairs	Various social programs related to the war, including medicine committees and support for low-income families	149,095
Higher Relief Council	Emergency and urgent matters	112,360
Higher Relief Council	Temporary compensation salaries	55,502
South Governorate	Operational expenses, including water, electricity, and communication costs	5,618
Bekaa Governorate	Procurement of consumer goods and fuel	899
South Governorate	Payment of EDL taxes	355

Source: Official Gazette



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## THE POLICY INITIATIVE

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