U.S. Council for Middle East Policy

Consolidating State Authority in Southern Lebanon

US priorities for verification and continuity of international monitoring

Policy Analysis 01 | 26 October 2026

Decision memorandum

The Council proposes a Washington-supported evidence and transition protocol within authorized arrangements. It operates exclusively through an authorized international intermediary communicating with each side separately. At every stage, it excludes direct Lebanon-Israel dealings, including meetings, negotiations, coordination, information exchange, and joint teams. The protocol defines completion evidence, dispute handling, and monitoring continuity, using existing capacity and filling demonstrated gaps.

The documented problem combines access constraints and security risks with an approaching change in the international mandate. The Secretary-General reported restrictions on UNIFIL movement; on 7 October, UNIFIL reported small-arms rounds striking a position near Kfar Shouba. These sources support testing access, protection, and functional continuity. They do not establish that every implementation failure is procedural.

The Council proposes that the Secretary of State task the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs with coordinating an implementation package alongside Embassy Beirut, US security-assistance authorities, and the US Mission to the UN. It would be presented to each government separately through the authorized international channel, defining responsibilities, access, protection, and funding. This is a proposal, not an existing official assignment.

Three deliverables before the end of 2026

First, a file for an existing test area, with standards secured through the intermediary and an authorized verifier. Second, a procedure distinguishing factual disputes from refusal to implement. Third, a transition schedule assigning each function, authority, and resources and disclosing gaps. The intermediary obtains approvals and responses from each side separately.

Choice and success criteria

Use only existing procedures consistent with exclusive intermediary channels, improving reporting where needed. Secure amendments through separate approvals collected by the intermediary. Lack of access, authority, or protection requires a political decision or an appropriate international arrangement; it neither warrants direct contact nor can be resolved by a database or civilian team alone.

Review results within ninety days of starting work, prioritizing actions needed before 31 December 2026. Assess sustained state capacity, verified Israeli withdrawal, civilian safety, and humanitarian access. The paper does not assign a budget or staffing number unsupported by a needs assessment. Legal obligations and civilian protection remain independent of reciprocal implementation steps.

1 Evidence and its limits

Identifiable implementation constraints

Public evidence	Supported inference	Limit
The Secretary-General's report S/2026/566, dated 9 July, records numerous restrictions on UNIFIL movement, with incidents detailed in annex I.	Field verification requires access that can be tested and obstruction that can be documented.	The report covers an earlier period; it does not establish the current status of every site.
UNIFIL's 7 October statement reports small-arms fire impacting a position near Kfar Shouba.	Protection is a condition of effective verification; naming a verifier or deploying personnel is insufficient.	The account is attributed to UNIFIL. This paper does not assign responsibility beyond what its evidence establishes.
Resolution 2790 ends operations and specifies functions during drawdown.	Continued personnel presence does not establish continuity of all previous functions.	The actual effect depends on capacity and any subsequent authorized decisions.

These sources support a bounded recommendation: make access, capacity, and functional continuity testable. They do not justify attributing all delays in withdrawal or state control of arms to a missing technical procedure. Political resistance, continuing military operations, or resource shortages may obstruct implementation even under a well-designed protocol.

What already exists

The framework published on 26 June provides for reciprocal sequencing, pilot zones, military coordination, assistance linked to verified results, and a security annex. Resolution 1701 remains a reference for state authority, security arrangements, withdrawal, and humanitarian access. This describes published provisions; the paper does not adopt any arrangement requiring direct Lebanon-Israel dealings.

A press-published annex describes third-party verification and trilateral discussion of disputes. The paper treats it neither as a certified official version nor as proof of operational completion, and does not propose direct discussions. Its proposed procedure uses separate submissions to the intermediary, without changing accepted texts or assuming authority to amend them.

The Council's contribution

Link evidence standards, dispute handling, and functional transition in one document governed by exclusive mediation. Identify existing coverage and necessary amendments or authority, obtaining approvals separately. Failure to publish a procedure is not evidence that the responsible bodies lack one.

2 Options and political incentives

Criterion	Existing intermediary channels	Complete procedures and transition plan	Broader international arrangement or authorized extension
Main advantage	Faster and less disruptive where channels function	Addresses specific gaps without duplicating institutions	May provide protection and coverage beyond a technical arrangement
Critical condition	Demonstrated access and dispute-handling capability	Separate approvals through intermediary for procedure, verification, and access	Political agreement, mandate, funding, and deployable capacity
Cost	Determined by gaps in current capacity	Incremental cost depends on the initial mapping	Depends on size, protection, and duration
Main risk	Unexplained and unreviewable implementation delays	Procedures obscure political refusal rather than resolve it	Delayed agreement or a deployed presence unable to move

Preferred option and decision limits

The Council favors completing procedures and a transition plan, beginning with an inventory of existing arrangements. This suits a defined near-term task and does not exclude a broader international arrangement if risk assessment establishes the need. The paper does not provide comparative dollar estimates or claim that a technical option can perform every UNIFIL function.

Why the parties might accept it

Lebanon gains a standard distinguishing actual military deployment from a claim of presence, documenting restrictions and withdrawal while preserving state authority. Israel receives authorized implementation findings from the verifier through the intermediary. Washington gains a basis for assessing assistance. These potential benefits establish neither consent nor direct evidence exchange or automatic disclosure of sensitive Lebanese information.

The intermediary obtains each side’s separate consent to the verifier, its authority, and impartiality safeguards; US technical leadership is not assumed acceptable. Separate diplomacy from evidence assessment. Perceived bias or political disagreement may undermine verification even where procedures are sound.

When the obstacle is political

Distinguish documented inability from refusal of an obligation or access, assigning remedies and review dates. Washington should engage each side separately and coordinate partners without establishing Lebanon-Israel contact. Review additional assistance under applicable eligibility and legal conditions. The paper promises no automatic sanctions or concessions and cannot guarantee changed incentives for an obstructing actor.

If existing intermediary channels suffice, use the first option. If protection or broader monitoring remains infeasible, examine an international alternative through separate contacts. Continue crisis containment and humanitarian support; no alternative permits direct Lebanon-Israel dealings.

3 Evidence and dispute protocol

Proposed responsibilities

The State Department coordinates diplomacy; Lebanon retains national decisions and military command. Each government independently designates a contact solely for the intermediary, which secures separate approvals for the verifier, its powers, and reporting authority. No direct Lebanon-Israel meetings, communication lines, or joint teams are permitted; representatives cannot override this restriction. The UN and partners remain within their mandates. Additions require demonstrated need.

One file for each obligation

The verifier records each obligation's scope, baseline, required action, evidence, inspection authority, sources and limits, and review date. Secure standards from each side separately through the intermediary and record disputed maps. No shared database or direct Israeli access to Lebanese records is permitted. Transmitting findings requires authorization and information safeguards.

Independently verify withdrawal, subsequent Lebanese takeover, and treatment of armed infrastructure, without direct military handover or joint patrols. Patrol counts do not establish control; one seizure does not establish an arms-free area. Record uninspected sites and reasons. Neither rely on one side's account alone nor require publication of sensitive sources.

Proposed procedural timeframes

Action	Proposed timing	Output
Urgent alert to intermediary	Immediately via international intermediary	Intermediary contacts each side separately to prevent escalation
Register complaint	Within 24 hours	Intermediary case file, evidence preservation, response requested through it
Initial assessment	Within 72 hours	Established facts, further inspection needs, unverifiable elements
Technical review	Within 7 days	Reasoned finding; objections collected separately through intermediary
Political escalation	At 14 days without remedy	Intermediary refers to political authorities through separate contacts

Timings require separate approvals through the intermediary; they are proposals, not operative provisions. Unsafe inspection means later review, not complaint expiry. Emergency liaison uses only the intermediary at all times, with an authorized international backup if unavailable. Direct contact is never a fallback under this proposal.

Findings do not confer new powers

Distinguish occurrence, attribution, and legal characterization in established, disputed, or unverifiable findings. Obtain accounts and objections separately through the intermediary; refer political disputes through it. No direct confrontation or expert authority above governments is created. An actor's objection alone cannot suppress a finding.

4 Work plan and expansion decision

The proposed start date is 1 November 2026, with review on 29 January 2027. These are organizational targets, not a promise to settle the conflict in ninety days. Reassess feasible work if adoption is delayed; the international mandate deadline does not shift automatically.

Target	Proposed responsible actors	Required output
15 November	Intermediary, State Department, national authorities separately	Check procedures against exclusive mediation; designate intermediary contact points
30 November	Verifier and national authorities	Baseline file for an existing test area; no additional task without authority and protection
15 December	Function holders and donors	Documented needs and incremental costs; identify transferable and sustainable functions
Before 31 December	Intermediary, UN, national authorities separately	Legally and operationally supported continuity plan; disclose uncovered functions
29 January	Authorized political and technical officials	Compare results with baseline; expand, correct, or change the arrangement

Conditions for progress

Certify completion within an inspected scope against standards obtained through the intermediary, recording evidence and coverage limits. Expansion requires sustained Lebanese capacity, verified Israeli steps, safe access, and resources. Verify withdrawal and deployment without direct military handover. Propose an initial thirty-day follow-up after Lebanese takeover, adjustable to risk and not a durability guarantee.

Suspend certification for an affected site when access is denied. Seek a defined remedy and subsequent review for an established violation. Expansion dependent on contested findings may be paused while humanitarian work and de-escalation continue. Do not delay a feasible withdrawal or independent legal obligation merely to await formal certification.

What decision-makers should see

A monthly report should show inspected sites against the total required, restrictions and their duration, the status of each objection, verified takeovers and withdrawals, operating and funding gaps, and consequences for roads, services, and civilian safety. Protect necessary personal and security information while explaining the reason and limits of nondisclosure.

Do not extend the test automatically. Persistent access denial or lack of protection, authority, or capacity should trigger discontinuation, crisis containment, or an alternative arrangement solely through the intermediary. Review causes politically every thirty days; review creates no right to remain, acceptance of fragmented sovereignty, or exception to the proposal’s exclusion of direct contact.

5 Functions resources and safeguards

Transfer by function

Prepare a register for intermediary liaison, deconfliction, verification, monitoring, humanitarian access, and records. Identify each function's holder, authority, capacity, protection, funding, and test date. Transition must preserve an authorized international channel and backup; no liaison function transfers to direct Lebanon-Israel contact.

Test each side's separate contact with the intermediary, complaint referral, evidence protection, access, and international backup arrangements. Disclose gaps and remedies without replacing mediation with direct contact. Assign no tasks beyond European or UN mandates; establishment of the EU support mission alone establishes neither deployment nor a ceasefire-monitoring role.

Needs-based funding

Inventory usable resources first, then cost the gap: workload, inspection and analysis days, operations, movement, communications, protection, insurance, maintenance, and explosive-hazard work where required. Support unit prices with a contract, quotation, or cost reference, stating date, validity, and coverage. Separate Lebanese military costs, verification, relief, and reconstruction.

The paper sets neither a budget range nor a staffing number: available evidence does not support an executable estimate. The annex provides a method for calculating incremental costs from documented quantities and prices after accounting for existing resources. This permits reviewable funding decisions without converting assumed prices into facts.

Legal and civilian safeguards

All procedures must respect Lebanese law and official mandates; the proposal authorizes no direct dealings with Israel or prohibited information exchange. Lebanese authorities must provide a written basis for measures affecting people or property, with authorization, review, complaints, and seized-property procedures. Assume no search or emergency powers. Political or sectarian affiliation is neither evidence of wrongdoing nor an eligibility criterion for relief.

Apply applicable funding rules, beneficiary controls, and audit; separate procurement approval from acceptance of delivery. Humanitarian assistance follows need and law. Recommendations imply no automatic sanctions relief or exemptions. Advice on civilian return should reflect hazards, services, and voluntary choice, not returnee numbers alone.

Political judgment

The value of US engagement lies in helping state institutions turn commitments into results and holding each actor accountable for performance. Better evidence can reduce informational disputes and expose obstruction; it cannot impose agreement on an unwilling party. The recommendation therefore combines a testable procedure with a political response when it fails, retaining withdrawal, state authority, and civilian protection as outcome criteria.

Implementation annex

Testing the recommendation against objections

Objection	Design response	Remaining political decision
Procedures already exist	Compare before adding; use existing procedures where sufficient	Publish enough for accountability without exposing sensitive information
Third party is biased	Define selection, conflicts, and separation of evidence from decision	Separate approvals through intermediary for body and report status
Lebanese forces lack capacity or political cover	Assess needs, legal basis, and protection before expansion	Provide resources and national backing while preserving command cohesion
An actor refuses withdrawal or implementation	Identify and document the obstacle, remedy, and review date	Diplomatic pressure, mediated negotiation, or alternative arrangement
Monitoring needs broader protection	Do not count unavailable capability as protocol success	Agree the mandate, funding, and contribution for an appropriate presence

Incremental cost model

Component	Quantity evidence	Pricing and substantiation
Verification analysis and records	Sites, visits, processing hours, specialties	Documented contract cost or actual incremental cost of existing staff
Movement protection and evacuation	Distances, movement days, risk assessment, vehicle needs	Task-appropriate quotations and insurance; separate protection support
Lebanese military operations and maintenance	Units, deployment days, serviceable assets, support gap	Competent military estimate compared with existing assistance
Communications data and audit	Accounts, devices, storage, oversight needs	Contracts or quotations and lawful use and information safeguards

Calculate gross cost from quantities multiplied by unit prices, add justified priced risks, and deduct existing resources legally and operationally available. A pledge is not an available balance. Substantiate each funding source, permitted purpose, uncommitted balance, and approving authority. Do not request a final appropriation before these inputs are complete.