

Supporting Lebanon Supports US Strategic Interests in the Region

Lebanon is on the brink of collapse due to its domestic economic and political crises, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Another failed state in the Middle East would negatively impact strategic US interests. Lebanon requires a thorough reorientation towards stability and renewed socio-economic sustainability, which entails fundamental domestic reforms and targeted international support led by the US.

America has significant strategic interests to support a strong and prosperous Lebanon

- Countering the influence of Iran and its proxy Hezbollah, as well as Russian regional encroachment.
- Maintaining security across the Lebanese-Israeli border to avoid another war.
- Maintaining successful CT cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).
- Sustaining a country hosting more than 1 million registered Syrian refugees, highest per capita in the world.
- Preventing a failed state in the region which would generate new flows of refugees (Syrians and Lebanese), new havens for ISIS and al-Qaeda, and further empower Hezbollah.
- Preserving Lebanon's unique example as an inclusive society of diverse peoples and cultures.

Supporting economic reforms

The Lebanese government's new Financial Recovery Plan is a good start and the government has taken the critical decision to seek IMF help, despite early domestic opposition. ***The question is if the plan is sufficient for the US to initiate support for the government, or whether it should wait until its words are turned into actions.***

We recommend that the US should offer specific assistance which includes:

- Making clear America's support for coordinating the country's recovery plan with the IMF to enable the country to reach its reform goals and attract international support for Lebanon.
- When Lebanon has met the requisite conditions, work with our partners to offer technical support on reducing government expenditures, and to implement CEDRE reforms to meet donor reform expectations.
- Consistency in the use of targeted sanctions, undertaking actions that help rather than hurt Lebanon as a country. Importantly, Hezbollah survives with Iranian support. Continuing "maximum pressure" on Iran without damaging Lebanon is essential to freeing Lebanon from Iranian influence.

US support for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)

Given the LAF's excellent working relationship with the US Department of Defense, the US should:

- Provide separate appropriations sufficient for LAF equipment and training to sustain its activities on the borders, counterterrorism operations, expanding its maritime presence, and targeted assistance to LAF families during this crisis.
- Restate support for negotiations between Israel and Lebanon to settle their land and maritime borders.

US support for the Lebanese people and civil society

The US should support the demonstrators' civil and human rights and encourage a national dialogue between government and civil society. The US should expand capacity-building assistance to promote the rule of law, an independent judiciary, and programs enabling Lebanese civil society to take a greater role in their country.

US Support for Refugees and Host Communities

The US should maintain its lead role among the international and regional donor community to provide assistance to refugees and the host communities reflecting the actual costs, and should work to promote conditions for refugees to voluntarily return home under conditions of dignity and security.

Renewing the US-Lebanon relationship

The US and Lebanon should renew their partnership in these challenging times for both nations in ways that strengthen the security, stability, and prosperity of both. The US should use its influence to undertake these recommended actions in concert with the Lebanese people and the institutions of the Lebanese state.