



American Lebanese Coalition

4900 LEESBURG PIKE, SUITE 203 ALEXANDRIA, VA 22302
P: 703-578-4214 F: 703-578-4615 WWW.ALCOALITION.ORG

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

AMERICAN LEBANESE ALLIANCE
PRESIDENT: TONY BOU SAMRA
8025 BONHOMME AVENUE
SUITE 1403
CLAYTON, MD 63105
PHONE: 314-727-7494
FAX: 314-721-8588
BOUSAMRA@ALCOALITION.ORG

AMERICAN LEBANESE COORDINATION COUNCIL
PRESIDENT: JOSEPH HAGE
9901 NW 80TH AVE # 3D
HIALEAH GARDENS, FL 33016
PHONE: 305-542-6322
FAX: 305-249-9446
JOSEPHHAGE@ALCC-RESEARCH.COM
WWW.ALCC-RESEARCH.COM

ASSEMBLY FOR LEBANON
PRESIDENT: MEL ZOHROB
24037 ACACIA
REDFORD, MI 48239
PHONE: 313-535-5252
FAX: 313-535-4411
MZOHROB@ALCOALITION.ORG

LEBANESE INFORMATION CENTER
PRESIDENT: JOSEPH GEBEILY
4900 LEESBURG PIKE
SUITE 203
ALEXANDRIA, VA 22302
PHONE: 703-578-4214
FAX: 703-578-4615
LIC@LICUS.ORG
WWW.LICUS.ORG

Lebanon's Journey to Freedom

A Policy Paper prepared by the American Lebanese Coalition – March 28, 2007

Overview

A sovereign and democratic Lebanon could play a crucial role in:

- providing peace and stability in the Middle East
- advancing democracy and freedom in the Arab world
- promoting inter-religious dialogue and coexistence
- presenting a living example of the viability of states in pluralistic societies

A free Lebanon will return to being a friendly nation to the West in general and the United States in particular.

The “Cedars Revolution”, which in 2005 led to the expulsion of the Syrian occupying army, to the holding of free parliamentary elections and the formation of the first post-occupation cabinet in Lebanon, in addition to the return of exiled Lebanese political leaders and the freeing of a major opposition leader who had been incarcerated under false pretenses, faces a formidable challenge. The forces opposing the restoration of sovereignty and democracy in Lebanon constitute an alliance of the armed and Iran-backed Hezbollah and the remnants of minor Lebanese political parties that are loyal to Syria, including the Aoun movement, which has since forged an alliance with the pro-Syrian factions. Under the false pretense of correcting inequities in governmental representation, they concocted a plan to disrupt the democratic process, paralyze the state institutions and cripple the Lebanese economy. From launching an unwarranted war on Israel, to staging illegal sit-ins in the heart of Beirut, to violently blocking roads and closing vital arteries such as the main airport and seaport, their true objective is to protect the Syrian regime from the establishment of the international tribunal that would try the assassins of former PM Rafic Hariri and other prominent Lebanese leaders, and to divert international pressure from Iran. Ultimately their goal is to return Lebanon to the dark days of the Syrian occupation.

While the Cedars Revolution movement, represented by the March 14th Coalition, enjoys the support of the majority of the Lebanese people, wide Arab and world support, and constitutional control of the state legal institutions, its opponents, the March 8th group, i.e. Hezbollah and its allies, rely on violent and demagogic actions to overthrow the legally-elected Government of Lebanon and to disrupt Lebanon's advance towards sovereignty and stability.

The imminent issues facing the Lebanese in the current crisis are:

- The establishment of the aforementioned international tribunal
- The disarming of militias, as stipulated in the Taef Accord and relevant United Nations resolutions
- The carrying out of the impending presidential elections

The political deadlock marring Lebanon and hindering its recovery is the result of interferences by Iran and Syria who consider Lebanon as a battle front against the United States and the forces of freedom in the region.

Current Threats

The events of the past twelve months prove that Lebanon is still facing serious threats to its stability and major obstacles to the restoration of its sovereignty.

Security: The unacceptable presence of armed militias supported by Syria and Iran constitute a direct threat to the stability and security of the Lebanese nation. The flow of arms, ammunitions and fighters through the Syrian-Lebanese border is a flagrant violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and a defiance of the international will. Furthermore, random bombings and political assassinations continue to threaten the stability of the country and to expose its fragile security.

Although the recent arrest of a ring of terrorists signaled commendable progress, Lebanon's security remains volatile at best. The Lebanese security forces and intelligence apparatuses continue to be infiltrated by Syrian allies and have fallen short of purging all of the officers and informants whose loyalty continues to be to Syria.

The disarmament of Hezbollah, Palestinian guerillas and other smaller militias as well as the purging of Syrian loyalists from the ranks of the Lebanese security forces are paramount conditions to establishing security in Lebanon.

Political and Constitutional: The Lebanese pluralistic society remains fragile and susceptible to polarization along sectarian lines, as exhibited in the current stalemate. The pro-Syrian, pro-Iranian Hezbollah Party and the Amal Movement falsely claim the exclusive representation of the Shias and have thus decided to walk out of the Government and to deny its legitimacy. They were promptly supported on this false representation by the pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud and by their ally Michel Aoun, who had recently joined the Syrian-Iranian camp. Syrian President Bashar Assad subsequently declared that Lebanon needs a new Government.

Moreover, Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri, who is also the leader of the pro-Syrian Amal Movement, used his official capacity to prevent the parliament from assembling and assuming its legislative role.

It is abundantly clear that the Syrian-Iranian plot is to paralyze all official institutions and to transform Lebanon into a lawless state by creating a governmental void. Most recently, leaders from the Syrian-Iranian camp have upped their rhetoric to threatening the nation that the upcoming presidential elections may lead to dire consequences ranging from bloodshed to full anarchy.

Economic: The Lebanese people, who have suffered the wars of others on their land, for over three decades, suffered yet again with the July 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel. The cost for the direct war damages varies across sources, but the most conservative estimate published by the "Council for Development and Reconstruction" stands at 3.6 billion US dollars, about 20% of Lebanon's GDP for 2006. Furthermore, much productive capacity has been lost, and there has been a massive exodus of many professionals.

The additional burden of the July war coupled with Lebanon's already unsustainable public debt and severe budget deficit stifled optimism for economic recovery. Instead of the 6 percent growth that had been projected for 2006, the economy declined by 5 percent.

The good news is that the Siniora government have shown strong leadership in rebuilding from the devastation of war and was also able to set up the "Paris III Donor's Conference" in January 2007 which provided a much needed, albeit temporary, economic reprieve. Yet, much still needs to be done, and Lebanon must continue to rely on aid and assistance from its friends in the international community if it is to achieve a more rapid economic recovery.

Policy Recommendations

The United States, in coordination with its allies in the region and in the world, should pursue the following existing and proposed policies in order to complete the Lebanese recovery and regain Lebanon as a friendly and peaceful nation.

1. Continue to require the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions such as 1559, 1680 and 1701, which call for the disarmament of Hezbollah and of the Palestinian camps as well as the cessation of military aid from any state to militias within Lebanon.
2. Consider international sanctions on Syria and Iran for violating United Nations resolutions and international laws by persistently arming and financing Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias operating in Lebanon.
3. Pressure the Syrian government to cooperate fully with Lebanon's demand for the demarcation of the Syrian-Lebanese border, starting with the demarcation of the border around the disputed Shebaa Farms.
4. Expand the role of UNIFIL to include the monitoring of the Syrian-Lebanese borders and appeal to Arab countries to join the UN contingent in securing Lebanon's sovereignty. Ultimately, and for their own sake, Arab regimes should be ready to confront Iran and Syria to force them to stop their destructive policies in the region.
5. Assist in strengthening the Lebanese Army and Internal Security Forces to enable them to counter the illegal and foreign-supported militias; to contain the threat of civil unrest; to prevent assassinations and other terrorist acts; through effective intelligence and counter-terrorism measures as well as prompt and effective criminal investigations.
6. Exert all necessary efforts and apply every feasible pressure to make the international tribunal that would try the assassins of former PM Rafic Hariri and other prominent Lebanese leaders a reality without further delay.
7. Support the upholding of the Lebanese constitution in the next presidential elections and the timely transfer of presidential powers and privileges. Concurrently, oppose any constitutional acrobatics by the pro-Syrian political leaders to prevent the Parliament from convening.
8. Support the enactment of a reformed and equitable legislative election law following the Presidential elections, to achieve a true representation of the various components of the Lebanese population
9. Come up with a realistic plan to resolve the issue of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon through their repatriation or resettlement in other Arab countries and which is not contingent on resolving the chronic Israeli-Arab conflict. Lebanon's peculiar religious and demographic considerations exclude the viability of naturalizing these refugees.
10. Disburse the economic aid to the Lebanese Government that was pledged at the Paris III donors' conference and make it conditional on compliance with international and US demands for democratic reforms and for anti-corruption measures.
11. Continue to engage, empower and assist the political leaders, entities, non-governmental agencies and individuals in Lebanon who genuinely and unequivocally support the freedom and democracy of Lebanon.
12. Defend the rights and the freedom of individuals and address the humanitarian issues of those Lebanese who:
 - a. Were displaced during the civil war
 - b. Were forcefully exiled from Lebanon into Israel and other countries
 - c. Are still detained in Syrian jails

The Long-term strategy

The future of stability and peace in Lebanon ultimately depends in part on the preservation of two fundamental principles:

- Non-interference in Lebanese affairs by regional powers and the disengagement of Lebanon from all regional conflicts
- Sustaining a consensual democracy that guarantees the rights of individuals and communities in a pluralistic society that is inherently comprised of minorities.

Lebanese-Americans' Role

The American Lebanese Coalition in particular and the Lebanese American community in general are strong believers in the guiding principles of our great nation, the United States of America.

The ALC have maintained an open channel of communications with the administration and with Congress for the purpose of establishing the best of possible relations between the United States of America and a free, sovereign, democratic Republic of Lebanon. We have been particularly active in the efforts to secure the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which was enacted thanks to the adamant US support for the sovereignty of Lebanon.

As such, we wish to continue and to expand our coordination with the administration and congress. We are offering to:

1. Serve as public diplomats and ambassadors of ideas, promoting the values and principles upon which the US was founded- such as liberty, human dignity and the rule of law.
2. Act as intermediaries between the policy makers in the US and prominent Lebanese leaders for the purpose of more efficiently communicating ideas and consolidating both points of view.
3. Provide analysis and information on Lebanese matters of interest to US officials.
4. Mobilize the Lebanese-American grassroots in support of advancing freedom and democracy.

Concluding Remarks

The global reach of terrorism proved that strategies based on prevention within the geographic boundaries of any one country will not be enough or effective in protecting the relevant country. The war against terrorism would have more chances to succeed when nations who are, or could become, potential havens for terrorism are transformed into allies in that war.

Lebanon is one of these countries. If it were to be allowed to remain under the Iranian, Islamist and Syrian influences it would turn into a mini-Afghanistan, when under Taliban rule but with a more sophisticated infrastructure and a more dense urban population where the terrorists would be hard to locate and to eliminate. That is why Lebanon should emerge as a strong and free nation: for the sake of stability in the region and of world peace.