

Saving Lebanon can help prevent Iran's web of terror from spreading in region, activists argue

Tue, 2022-02-01 22:55

CHICAGO: Lebanon will be “another Iran-dominated, corruption-riddled failed state” if critical steps are not taken soon to end government corruption in the country, tackle the economic challenges it is facing and address the “crippling” issue of Hezbollah’s violence.

This is the conclusion of a report published on Tuesday by two leading Middle East think tanks based in Washington, the American Task Force on Lebanon and the Middle East Institute. To mark the occasion they hosted a webinar during which panelists discussed ways in which the report’s powerful conclusions might be implemented and order restored to Lebanon.

A major part of the discussion focused on the role of Hezbollah, and participants noted that the outcome of the ongoing US negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program could have significant ramifications for Lebanon.

Paul Salem, the president of the Middle East Institute, said Lebanon faces many challenges, including the failure to eliminate sectarianism over the past 31 years, but that a greater challenge is the continuing presence and power of Hezbollah as a non-state actor with allegiance to Iran.

“(A) crippling issue is the presence of Hezbollah,” he said. “This (Lebanese) government, no matter how they reform their government system, and no matter how much they are able to fight corruption or take some good decisions, the fact of the matter is the Lebanese state is not sovereign.

“It doesn’t control its border. It doesn’t control its territory. It doesn’t control the decisions of war and peace. There is a full-fledged army that is in complete allegiance to a foreign country – which is the Islamic Republic of Iran, which they proudly say so – that does not answer to the Lebanese people, does not answer to the Lebanese government or the Lebanese parliament or the Lebanese state. That is also a crippling problem.”

Salem said he does not see Hezbollah’s power in Lebanon changing, even if the US and Iran reach an agreement in Vienna.

“With or without a return to the nuclear deal, Iran remains committed to an advanced defense strategy, remains committed to standing up militias in other countries,” he said. “(In the past) it was Lebanon, and now it is Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.”

In his introductory remarks, congressman Darrell Issa gave an assurance that the US remains committed to Lebanon and to the staging of “free and fair elections” scheduled for May for the parliament and later in the year for the

presidency.

The participants in the discussion also included Edward M. Gabriel, president of the ATFL and a former ambassador; Brian Katulis, the MEI's vice president of policy; and journalist Joyce Karam. It was moderated by Jean AbiNader, the ATFL's vice president for policy.

"If we don't get the Iran deal correct, we have missed our best chance of dealing with this outside pressure on the country of Lebanon," said Gabriel, referring to Hezbollah's ties with Iran.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

"The United States should realize they are in for some tough times by the Gulf, by Israel, by the Lebanese Americans if, in fact, they don't deal with terrorism proxies in the region."

Katulis said that the world must get past the idea that "Lebanon is lost." He added that he hopes US President Joe Biden, who began his term in office by placing much focus on Iran and Yemen, will see that the future of Lebanon "is directly linked to the issue of Iran."

AbiNader said that saving Lebanon is "critical to America."

He added: "Without strong support from the United States and its friends, Iran and Syria would dominate Lebanon and likely pose increased terror threats to the United States. This does not serve American interests."

The ATFL/MEI report highlights a number of hurdles that need to be cleared to improve the situation in Lebanon and end the crises it faces, and calls on Biden and the US to lead a "diplomatic coalition" to encourage the implementation of political and economic reforms.

All of the panelists agreed on the need to "significantly reduce corruption at all levels of government" in Lebanon.



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Gulf states review Lebanon's response to proposal to ease rowVatican envoy accuses Lebanese politicians of profiting from country's suffering

[63 migrants rescued off Morocco: activists](#)

Author:

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1643741669736856900

Tue, 2022-02-01 21:59

RABAT: The Moroccan navy on Tuesday rescued 63 migrants including 15 women and three children after their vessel started to sink as they tried to reach the Canary Islands, activists said.

Alarm Phone, which provides an emergency hotline for migrants in trouble at sea, said on Twitter that “63 people in severe distress close to the Moroccan coast were found by the Moroccan navy and safely brought to shore.” The Moroccan authorities did not immediately confirm the operation. Helena Maleno Garzon of rights group Caminando Fronteras had earlier warned that dozens of people were sinking in an inflatable boat off Tarfaya, on Morocco’s southern coast, and would “die if they are not rescued soon.” Migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, regularly use Morocco as a launchpad for attempts to reach European shores. Last year more than 4,000 migrants died or went missing in such attempts, mostly as they tried to reach the Canary Islands, according to Caminando Fronteras. Many choose to head for the Spanish territory in the Atlantic as shorter routes across calmer Mediterranean waters are more closely monitored, the group says.



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Six migrants drown off Tunisia, 30 missing At least 11 migrants drown off Tunisia in shipwreck

Iranian teachers in new day of protests over pay

Author:

Wed, 2022-02-02 00:41

TEHRAN: Thousands of Iranian school teachers have protested and staged a one-day strike over the slow implementation of salary and pension reforms, local media reported on Tuesday.

Reformist newspaper Arman Melli said the teachers demonstrated outside parliament in Tehran and Education Ministry offices in provincial cities including Isfahan and Shiraz.

The paper said it was the third day of protests by teachers in recent weeks.

Iran's ILNA news agency reported that striking teachers in Alborz province, west of the capital, carried placards demanding "Free the imprisoned teachers."

It was an apparent reference to colleagues detained at previous rallies.

Protesters called for the alignment of teachers' salaries with those of other public sector employees among other demands, ILNA said.

"Unfortunately, our salary with a master's degree and sometimes a doctorate is about 4.5 million tomans (\$160) per month," it quoted a protesting teacher in the city of Yazd as saying.



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Frenchman jailed in Iran halts hunger strike: familyUS officials say negotiations on Iran nuclear program at crossroads

[Blinken discusses Palestinian Authority reform with Mahmoud Abbas](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-02-01 02:56

WASHINGTON: In a further step to strengthen bilateral relations, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the need for reform in the Palestinian Authority in a phone call on Monday with President Mahmoud Abbas, the State Department said.

President Joe Biden has sought to repair ties weakened when his predecessor, President Donald Trump, slashed aid to Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza and closed a US consulate for Palestinians in Jerusalem. The Biden administration has restored aid and pledged to reopen the consulate over Israeli objections, while urging Abbas, 86, to change several policies including payments his self-rule authority makes to Palestinians held in Israeli jails.

Briefing reporters on Monday, State Department spokesperson Ned Price did not mention the prisoner stipends but said Blinken and Abbas discussed “the need for reform within the Palestinian Authority.”

The two also discussed “the need to improve quality of life for the Palestinian people in tangible ways,” Price said.

In a readout of the phone call, Abbas’ office did not mention any discussion of reform within the authority, which exercises limited self-rule in West Bank territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

Good discussion with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas today. We discussed strengthening the U.S.-Palestinian relationship, and the need for Palestinian Authority reform and for Palestinians & Israelis alike to enjoy equal measures of freedom, security, & prosperity.

– Secretary Antony Blinken (@SecBlinken) [January 31, 2022](#)

Abbas told Blinken that Israel must “stop the abuse of prisoners and ... the withholding of taxes.” Israel in 2018 began deducting the value of the prisoner stipends from taxes it collects on the Palestinian Authority’s behalf and transfers to it monthly.

Israel and the US say the stipends, dispersed monthly to prisoners, their relatives and the families of Palestinians killed for allegedly carrying out attacks, encourage further violence.

The Palestinians consider them a form of welfare for inmates and families they regard as national heroes.

Meanwhile, two members of Wisconsin’s congressional delegation asked the Biden administration Monday to investigate how a Palestinian-American who lived in Milwaukee before moving back to his home village died at a West Bank checkpoint.

Omar Assad, 78, died after Israeli troops stopped him at a checkpoint in his native village of Jiljilya during the early morning hours of Jan. 12, according to family members and media reports.

Assad’s nephew, Assad Assad, said others who were detained at the checkpoint told family members that the soldiers dragged Assad out of his car, threw him to the ground and shackled his hands and feet with zip ties, then fled after he died on the spot.

The Israeli military has said Omar was detained after resisting an inspection and later released, implying he was alive. It’s unclear exactly when he died. An autopsy performed by Palestinian doctors that became public on Thursday determined the cause of death was a heart attack brought on by “external violence.”

Lt. Col. Amnon Shefler, an Israeli military spokesman, said Assad’s death remains under investigation and that “actions will be taken if wrongdoing is found.”

Assad was born in Jiljilya but spent about 40 years in the United States. He became a US citizen before he returned to his home village in 2009 to retire with his wife, Nazmia, his nephew told The Associated Press.

US State Department officials have said they’re seeking clarification about

the events leading up to Assad's death.

US Sen. Tammy Baldwin and Rep. Gwen Moore sent a letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken asking him to launch an investigation into Assad's death and whether the soldiers involved used equipment procured with American aid. "We strongly support human rights and the rule of law as the foundation of United States foreign policy," Baldwin and Moore wrote. "As a Palestinian American, Mr. Assad deserves the full protections afforded US citizens living abroad and his family deserves answers."

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Monday that he hadn't seen the request from Baldwin and Moore and the agency hasn't seen a final report from Israeli officials.

"We continue to support an investigation that is thorough and comprehensive into the circumstances of the incident and we welcome receiving additional information as soon as possible," Price said.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six Day War in 1967. Assad Assad said his uncle and aunt left Jiljilya for Chicago in 1969 in hopes of finding jobs. They moved to Milwaukee in 1974 and prospered, opening convenience stores and a restaurant, he said.

They were among dozens of Jiljilya residents who have returned to the village over the years to build retirement homes, Assad Assad said.

(With Reuters and AP)



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Palestinians raise funds for Syrians living in tents
Autopsy says violence caused death of detained Palestinian

Lebanon pleased with Gulf reaction to Kuwaiti initiative

Mon, 2022-01-31 22:53

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants believes the country's response to the Kuwaiti initiative proposing confidence-building measures to end a diplomatic rift with Gulf states had a "positive impact" during Sunday's Arab League consultative meeting in Kuwait.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib attended Sunday's meeting, at which Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah once again stressed his country's "keenness to maintain Lebanon's stability and the welfare of its people."

He noted that Kuwait will keep trying to mend the relationship, adding: "The concerned authorities in Kuwait and the Gulf countries will discuss the Lebanese response to decide on the next steps with Lebanon."

The Lebanese response stressed Beirut's commitment to respect all international resolutions in a manner that guarantees domestic peace and stability, and the government's commitment, in word and deed, to the policy of neutrality, so the country is not turned into a platform for attacks against Arab countries.

The response did not mention specific international resolutions or steps to implement them, such as UN Security Council resolution 1559 – which was adopted in 2004 and calls for the disarmament of armed militias in Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia and several other Gulf countries cut diplomatic ties with Lebanon in October 2021 after Information Minister George Kordahi offended the Kingdom.

Kordahi then resigned in November in an attempt to ease the situation, but the crisis persisted amid hostility from Hezbollah.

The Lebanese Cabinet resumed discussions for the 2022 budget on Monday, while a speech by Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, scheduled for Monday, was postponed.

Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi announced Lebanon's support for the UAE "against attempts to target Arab legitimacy, which we are keen to preserve

and strengthen,” adding: “We have been, and will remain, unified in the fight against harm and evil of all kinds.”

Mawlawi also briefed the Cabinet on busting 17 spy networks in Lebanon, allegedly working for Israel.

The Information Branch of the Internal Security Forces was able to uncover the networks, arresting at least 10 suspects.

A security source stated: “Over a month ago, specifically after the bombing that shook the Burj Al-Shemali Palestinian refugee camp in Tyre, southern Lebanon, the branch obtained information about a person close to Hamas being linked to the bombing.

“The Information Branch was able to uncover multiple unconnected networks after monitoring the suspect’s movement and communications,” said the source, adding that a number of suspects were arrested and were currently under investigation.

Two suspects are allegedly from the city of Sidon, with another employed at a commercial center in the city of Tyre. Other suspects live inside and around Sidon.

One was arrested in Tyre, and his house and the house of another suspected agent were raided simultaneously. Large quantities of gift boxes, perfumes and computers were confiscated.

The spy networks are thought to be distributed throughout Lebanon and include agents from different sects, initial investigations reportedly revealed.

These agents were apparently recruited through social media, with most unaware that they were working for Israel, while others knew and were asked to buy burner phones.

On Monday, President Michel Aoun asked the foreign minister to file a complaint in the UN Security Council against Israel for “using Lebanon’s airspace” to attack Syria, with the Cabinet condemning the “Israeli breach that took place at 3 a.m., when Israeli planes bombed the Syrian territory from the airspace of Riyaq in the Bekaa.”

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported “human losses resulting from the Israeli bombardment, which targeted Hezbollah sites and warehouses, northeast of Damascus.”



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Lebanon highlights drug seizures as PM 'smooths rough edges' of response to Kuwaiti initiative
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