

US Military Aid Will Not Break the Bond Between Lebanese Army and Hezbollah

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Travelling to Lebanon last week U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy had promised to find additional means “to support” the population and the Lebanese army. On September 7, Murphy came good on his promise after U.S. President Joe Biden authorized Secretary of State Antony Blinken to raise a total of \$47 million to provide aid for the Lebanese military.

It appears that the American aid aims to prevent the implosion of the Lebanese military. Senator Richard Blumenthal, who was a part of Murphy’s delegation, admitted as much by telling reporters:

“Lebanon is in free fall... we’ve seen this movie before and it’s a horror story... but the good news is it can, should, and hopefully will be avoided.”

Lebanon is in chaos and has been for years. However, last year’s Port of Beirut blast tipped the country over the edge, and now even officers in the Lebanese military, one of the most trusted and respected institutions in the country, receive about \$400 a month, down from \$4,000. A non-commissioned soldier only receives \$50 a month.

Mohammed Fahmi, outgoing Lebanese Minister of the Interior, told the Lebanese daily Al Joumhouria on August 31 that the rate of desertion in the Internal Security Forces, Lebanon’s Gendarmerie, has recently increased because of financial issues. A general collapse of Lebanon is occurring, especially as unpaid and/or low paid security forces are no longer responding to street mobilizations and urban violence.

The Lebanese are becoming increasingly frustrated as lines at gas stations are endless, power cuts are more frequent, bakeries and restaurants are closing because of a lack of electricity and pharmacies have run out of medicines.

With general life collapsing in Lebanon and the financial situation seemingly irreconcilable, sectarianism is once again creeping into society. August was marked by clashes between Sunni Arab tribes and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah political and paramilitary group,

tensions between Druze villagers and Hezbollah supporters, and acts of vandalism against a Christian village.

Against this backdrop, American aid would therefore be more than welcomed in Beirut as it allows the last respected pillar of the Lebanese state, the military, to not collapse. A collapse of the Lebanese military would likely instigate sectarian clashes between the different religious communities in the country as they seek to protect, and advance, their own interests.

Washington increased its aid to the Lebanese military by 12% last May, reaching \$120 million in 2021. This financial support is multisectoral and aims to improve the equipment of the army - from armored vehicles to combat helicopters and night vision systems. Washington is also trying to train Lebanese soldiers, and since 2014, more than 6,000 military personnel have received training in the U.S.

Other western countries, such as former colonial master France, are also privileged partners of the Lebanese military too. French Defense Minister Florence Parly organized a virtual meeting on June 17 to gather emergency aid for the Lebanese army, a “pillar institution, which prevents the security situation in the country from strongly deteriorating,” according to her cabinet. France and Lebanon also signed three conventions last February on defense, naval cooperation and the fight against terrorism. Since 2016, Paris has delivered more than €60 million of equipment to the Lebanese military.

Although the financial support from the U.S. and France is undeniably generous as it helps maintain and preserve Lebanon’s most respected institution, there is undoubtedly a political objective - a policy of rebalancing vis-à-vis Hezbollah and Iran. Washington and Paris fully understand that if the Lebanese military collapses, then Hezbollah will fill the void to maintain security in the country and thus be further cemented into state structures.

Washington believes that the Lebanese army can counterbalance Hezbollah’s influence and power. The U.S. is especially worried that the Lebanese Shi’ite party is less impacted by the economic collapse because of allocated Iranian aid that reaches \$700 million per year - a huge amount in Lebanon. The pro-Iranian party has recently undertaken initiatives to alleviate the deficiencies of a failed Lebanese state by importing Iranian oil in an attempt to solve the gasoline shortage, provide assistance to the families that suffered from the [Akkar tanker explosion](#) in August, and provide free and/or affordable healthcare.

However, Washington does not consider that the Lebanese army actually has cordial relations with Hezbollah. In fact, relations between Hezbollah and the military are so close that the Shi’ite group has an especially strong presence in Lebanon’s intelligence community and the two forces regularly conduct joint exercises to secure the country’s border. It is recalled that in August 2017, in the context of the Syrian War spilling over the border, Lebanese soldiers and Hezbollah fighters cleared out a pocket of jihadist in the Beqaa valley.

Although the Lebanese military is on the verge of collapse, the U.S. will not allow it to happen as it is their only gateway to any kind of influence in Lebanon. However, it appears that there is a clear misunderstanding or miscalculation in Washington - they will never be able to cut the ties between the Lebanese military and Hezbollah so long as Beirut refuses to make peace with Israel, something that is very unlikely to happen anytime soon.

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