



LEBANESE INFORMATION CENTER

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LEBANESE INFORMATION CENTER STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN LEBANON

LIC Welcomes Return of PM Hariri, Urges Efforts Against Iran's Overreach

The Lebanese Information Center in Washington, DC welcomes the return of Lebanon's resigned Prime Minister Saad Hariri to Beirut, while stressing the need to continue focusing on the paramount threat posed to Lebanon and the broader region by Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah.

LIC President Dr. Joseph Gebeily was in Lebanon during Hariri's surprise resignation and held a series of meetings with government officials, military leaders, politicians, United Nations representatives, and other key stakeholders, accompanied by the head of the LIC's Office of UN Relations Dr. Melanie Raffoul. They discussed the political state of play in light of Hariri stepping down, the security situation in Lebanon and the region, and the issue of Syrian refugees.

Throughout these meetings, it was clear that the existential threats to Lebanon's politics and security remain unresolved: Hezbollah's dominance and Iran's overreach in Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East.

Hariri was appointed premier as part of a 2016 arrangement that also led to General Michel Aoun's election as president and stipulated Lebanon's neutrality towards regional conflicts. This arrangement ultimately failed because of Hezbollah's repeated violations of Lebanon's "disassociation" policy.

On the security front, these actions include Hezbollah's ongoing military interventions in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq; its efforts to sideline the Lebanese army in the fight against terrorist groups along Lebanon's eastern border; and its negotiated deal with the Islamic State group (ISIS/ISIL) that chiefly served Hezbollah's own agenda and that of its patron Iran -- not Lebanon's interests. These nefarious activities threaten Lebanon's security and its people.

Hezbollah is also damaging Lebanon's political standing in an increasingly volatile Middle East. It continues to viciously slam Saudi Arabia and other Gulf allies, resulting in a direct backlash against the livelihoods and economic interests of Lebanese citizens in the Gulf. Cabinet ministers

allied to Hezbollah have visited Damascus without the Lebanese government's approval, as part of Hezbollah's attempt to forcefully open official relations with the Syrian regime.

Unfortunately, it is clear that Lebanon's year-old government has been unable to confront Hezbollah. The cabinet has not reined in Hezbollah's violations of the "disassociation" policy, including its dangerous regional interventions and its movement of fighters and equipment across borders. State security forces are unable to adequately monitor Hezbollah's military movements in southern Lebanon, or prevent any acts of aggression that may spark a new war with Israel.

In recent weeks, policymakers and observers have suggested that Hariri's resignation would exacerbate regional tensions and ultimately destabilize Lebanon. The LIC stresses that, despite recent developments, it is still Hezbollah that poses the preeminent threat to Lebanon's security and prosperity.

The LIC recognizes PM Hariri's return to office last week as an important step towards reasserting the state's legitimate monopoly on policy-making, particularly in decisions of peace and war. We hope Lebanon's factions will seize this opportunity.

The LIC also urges all friends of Lebanon, particularly the United States, to focus their efforts on confronting Iran's expansionism. With tens of thousands of militiamen deployed across multiple countries, alliances with the region's most brutal regimes, and a radical, violent Islamist ideology, Iran and its proxies remain the main menace to regional stability and must therefore be a policy priority for the US government.

The Lebanese Information Center in the US, the largest grassroots organization of Americans of Lebanese descent, remains committed to work through its organization, bolstered by its grassroots support and longstanding relationships with the US government, to build a free, sovereign and democratic Lebanon, for the good of the Lebanese people and in the interests of the United States of America.

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