US POLICY TOWARDS LEBANON: HURDLES AND PROSPECT

[**Issue Number 61 - July 2007**](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/61-d)

**US Policy towards Lebanon: Hurdles and Prospect**
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When Iranian revolutionaries entered the US embassy in Teheran in 1979 and seized 52 Americans, President Jimmy Carter dismissed reminders of America’s long intervention in Iran as “ancient history.” Carter’s attitude was a clear refusal to learn any lesson from past history. In his view, bringing up old matters was more than unhelpful; it was also dangerous and could only serve the interests of America’s adversaries. As the United States finds itself facing another large crisis in Iraq, it is worth asking why there should be hostility towards America in the Middle East. Before beginning this study on the US policy towards Lebanon, some insight can be gained by surveying US policies towards the region since the end of WWII. As the search for oil in the Middle East gained increasing momentum at the end of WWII, two very important issues arose that would become the center of political pre-occupation through almost every Presidential administration from Truman to George W. Bush. The first pre-occupation was in regard to the Soviet expansion, and the second was Israel’s security and well-being(1). Under the Truman era, Washington sought to assume only a secondary role in the Middle East next to Britain who shared the same enthusiasm for the prevention of Soviet expansion. Washington was to handle the “Western bastions of the Middle East” such as Greece and Turkey, while the British were to maintain control of the Arabian Gulf oil fields and the Suez Canal which were considered “primary interests.”(2)By the 1950’s, Britain foothold in the region was slipping dramatically and Washington stood ready to fill in the void. With Truman no longer in office, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, took a harder line approach to the Middle East crisis beginning with Iran. They were concerned that the rising instability in Iran might provide the Soviets with good reason to advance towards the Indian Ocean when the United States was still prepared to defend the region. The plan was to overthrow the democratic regime of Mohamed Mossadegh who governed by popular rule. Unlike Truman who expressed outrage at Stalin’s late withdrawal, calling it a “gross violation” to the integrity and sovereignty of the Iranian people, Eisenhower’s administration took a less favorable approach to self-determination in Iran when it came to issues related to US interests. The United States, as the heir to British imperialism, became from this point a frequent object of suspicion. The United States, like the European colonial powers before it, has been unable to avoid becoming entangled in the region’s political conflicts. Driven by the desire to keep the best oil reserves in friendly hands and out of potential rivals’ and to oppose ‘neutrality’ positions in the cold war, the United States has compiled a record of tragedy in the Middle East, the most recent being the

occupation of Iraq. An examination of the US policy towards Lebanon cannot be made outside of the geo-strategic importance of the Middle East to the United States. Two formal methods of approaching this study will be employed. The first method is a descriptive approach which focuses on attempting to understand the immediate sequences of events that lead to a particular outcome. The other approach focuses on a theoretical, historical analysis in order to better understand why things happen the way they did.

**Strategic Importance of Lebanon**

Lebanon’s importance to the US is a factor determining future policies towards the country and, more generally, towards the Middle East; previously, that policy shifted every time there was a new administration. It has been argued that Lebanon’s importance has been based on the idea that Lebanon was a democracy. The US under this assumption looked at Lebanon as a free country which had been historically democratic. Its people, despite a variety of ethnic and religious identities were able to live together in peace for scores of years. It was also argued that the Lebanese experience in self-rule and reconciliation among different religious groups was the reason for peace, prosperity, and modern government institutions that set Lebanon apart from all its neighbors after independence. This achievement was not at all a result of any initiative undertaken by the French Mandate. (3)This argument implies that Lebanese democratic ideas and practice were inherent in the Lebanese culture and not caused by French influence and, consequently, democracy could flourish if the conditions for its growth were properly planted. This logic has enormous implications for US foreign policy that consistently claimed to propagate democracy throughout other continents. President George W. Bush returned to the idea which was one of the basic principles for US policy for Lebanon and the Middle East and stated, “Finally, the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.”(4)Historically, Lebanon patterned its economic and educational systems on Western principles. It had always been known as a merchant nation up until the beginning of the civil war in 1975. During this time, Lebanon was an example of liberal democracy in the Arab world. It was described once by the British Broadcasting Corporation as a haven of liberalism and a hub for economic, social, intellectual and cultural life in the Middle East. Uncensored press facilitated an open exchange of ideas and provided various opinions. Beirut became the banking center for the Arab world. Many observers looked at Lebanon as being the sole example of a liberal democratic government amidst authoritarian regimes in the Arab countries. All of that made Lebanon a potential strategic and important ally to the United States from the first days of its attempt to fill the void left by the British in the Middle East.

From the military perspective, Lebanon’s geographical position also presented a strategic opportunity for the US. Its sea ports and airports were ideal settings to establish forward military bases for any potential operation in the region. It was considered as a gateway to the Arab world which would strengthen the US strategic deployments in the eastern Mediterranean along with Turkey and Israel. Such a position could also have great effect on any conflict in the Mediterranean region. Last but not least, Lebanon was a significant asset to the US strategy during the cold war in preventing the spread of communism and the threat of Soviet expansion. It has also been considered a significant actor in bringing peace and stability to the whole region. Reagan emphasized such a role by stating, “A stable and revived Lebanon is essential to all our hopes for peace in the region.” (5)Because of Lebanon’s importance in the regional geo-strategic setting, the US government has been deeply involved in insuring Lebanon’s political stability. The first manifestation of the American will came in July 1958 when the US marines landed on Lebanon’s shores to contain the first Lebanese civil war.

**The Eisenhower Doctrine**

Eisenhower’s opposition to the military conduct of Israel, Great Britain, and France against Egypt during the Suez crisis in 1956 was explained by his opposition to old style colonialism. Eisenhower wanted America, as a new world power, to win the friendship of the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia and to prevent them from falling under Soviet influence. Such a task could not be accomplished if the United States were to be perceived to be on the side of such flagrant acts of imperialism committed against Egypt. It is also important to note that the US wished to stop any European challenge to US dominance in the Middle East.(6)

When the UN call for a cease-fire failed to stop the conflict in Egypt, the Soviet Union threatened to intervene and Nikolai Bulganin even proposed to Eisenhower to undertake joint military action to end the war. Eisenhower rejected the proposal and warned the Soviets not to get involved.(7)At the end of the crisis, the United States became directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict and has become since then the only guarantor of Israel’s security. Early in 1957, Eisenhower delivered a message to Congress in which he referred to the instability in the Middle East being “heightened and at times manipulated by international communism” - that is to say, by the Soviet Union. He proposed a program of economic aid, military assistance, and cooperation and the possible use of US troops when requested by friendly governments caught “against overt, armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism.”(8)The Congress ultimately approved the Eisenhower doctrine and authorized the spending of up to 200 million dollars to initiate its implementation. Twelve of the fifteen Middle Eastern states approached by the administration accepted the doctrine; however, only Lebanon endorsed the doctrine in return for promises of economic aid. (9)The Eisenhower doctrine was not understood by many people, especially among the Arabs. Egypt, Syria and some North African states made it clear that they did not rank the Soviet Union their number one threat and said they saw no danger from international communism. (10)The first test for the Eisenhower doctrine came in April 1957: when Jordan faced a pan-Arabist challenge from socialist­nationalist and communist parties, the US government moved the Sixth Fleet to the Eastern Mediterranean and provided ten million dollars in economic aid to Jordan. When Syria appeared to be moving closer to Egypt and the Soviets, the Eisenhower administration put the armed forces in Turkey, Iran and Jordan on alert and warned against outside interference. The crisis ended without direct US intervention. An interpretation of Eisenhower’s attitude to what was going on in the Middle East was given by his biographer Stephen Ambrose who wrote: “What Eisenhower really feared was radical Arab nationalism” and its threats to the feudal monarchies rather than internal communism. (11)

**Enactment of Eisenhower Doctrine**

A big military intervention under the Eisenhower doctrine took place in Lebanon in 1958. The revolution in Lebanon came during a rising period of pan-Arabism which reached its peak when Egypt and Syria became united. The union between these two countries worried several Arab regimes. In response, a coalition was created between King Hussein with his fellow Hashemite ruler in Iraq, causing King Saud of Saudi Arabia to express his great concern. For the Western powers and their friends in the Middle East, the creation of the United Arab Republic was ominous news. For the advocates of Arab nationalism this was a gift from God. Throughout Lebanon, popular demonstrations filled the streets in the predominantly Moslem cities of Tripoli, Saidon and Tyre. In Beirut, there was a celebratory strike. Little more than a week had passed before a delegation from the National Union Front had traveled to Damascus to congratulate the Syrian government on the formation of the U.A.R. This constituted the beginning of a pilgrimage of Lebanese to Damascus during the spring of 1958 which one account places the number at more than 300,000 people. The jubilation reached its peak when, on the 24th of February, President Jamal Abdul Nasser himself arrived in Damascus. Among the visitors at Damascus to see the Egyptian president were Saab Salam, Kamal Jumblat and other several prominent figures in the movement opposed to President Camille Chamoun. The formation of the U.A.R. enheartened the Lebanese opposition. It had lent an air of authenticity to pan-Arabism and increased the opposition’s claims against Chamoun and his government. The government’s reaction to the opposition’s manifesto calling for Chamoun’s resignation was a ban on demonstrations which was widely ignored by the opposition. In reaction to the pictures of Nasser covering the walls of the city, Chamoun asked his supporters to do the same with his pictures, and he refused to make any statement disavowing an intention to seek another presidential term when his supporters were lobbying in the parliament for a constitutional amendment to allow a second term. The popular demonstrations of February 1958 grew into riots during March and April. The Chamoun government accused Syria of assisting the insurgency with arms. President Chamoun had told the American, British, and French ambassadors of his desire to seek another term, and besides that, one of his supporters in the parliament, had announced the intention to present a constitutional amendment.(12)It was not clear, facing such a series of events, how the crisis could have been averted when the civil war became a reflection of the regional turmoil. The political forces inside Lebanon felt themselves to be part of the regional controversy. Each group saw itself as possessing strength greater than its own power inside the society and, by the same logic, external powers viewed the fortunes of their supporters as their own. These complications with subsequent events made the outbreak of  violence inevitable. Observers saw in the beginning of May 1958 a very dangerous climate of sliding towards a dangerous strife and all what was needed for its start was a symbolic act. Such an act came on May 8 when chief editor of the newspaper Al-Telegraph, Nassib Al Matni, was assassinated in Beirut. (13)The assassination incited an immediate convulsion of violence more severe than Lebanon had yet seen. In Tripoli, the three days of rioting there caused more than 120 casualties. Strikes and counter-strikes were called by various groups. In the streets of Beirut, there were confrontations between the two sides, and the security forces could not handle the situation. In fact, events had overtaken leaders on both sides. Three days after the murder of Matni, President Chamoun hinted to the American Ambassador, Robert McClintock, that the government might ask for the US marines to land in Beirut. When Kamal Jumblat Druze followers attacked the Presidential palace in Beit Eddine on May 13, Chamoun summoned the American, British and French ambassadors and put them on notice that their assistance might be requested. Ambassador McClintock had been empowered to tell Chamoun that the US would entertain his request provided Lebanon would present a complaint against external interference to the Security Council. The series of the events in Tripoli and Beirut coupled with Chamoun’s assessment of the situation must have painted a dark picture in Washington. Dr. Charles Malek, Lebanon’s Foreign Minister, was to press charges of subversion against the U.A.R. before the Security Council and the Arab League. When the Arab League was offering a compromise for settlement, Malek did not attend the meeting and rejected the compromise. Apparently, Chamoun and Malek were more interested in seeing the question come before the UN. The Security Council addressed the Lebanon question in early June and quickly dispatched observers to the scene to insure that there would be no illegal infiltration of personnel or arms across the Syrian-Lebanese border(14). In contrast, neighboring Iraq had caused no anxiety for the United States so when trouble came from Baghdad, the surprise to the US was all the greater when, on the morning of July 14, King Faisal and his Crown Prince were assassinated in a coup d’etat led by Abdul Karim Kassim, known to be a nationalist and a U.A. R. sympathizer. There were fears that there was another coup in the making against King Hussein of Jordan. The Lebanese opposition celebrated the event, while President Chamoun became more fearful about his future and he lost no time in summoning Ambassador McClintock to ask for a military intervention within 48 hours(15). Meetings were held in the White House and the American forces world-wide were put on alert. Everything was set for a US unilateral intervention in Lebanon. Secretary of State Dulles elevated the problem to a matter of national strategic principle, insisting that the time had come for the United States to meet the challenge in the Middle East head on. The JCS Chairman General Twining was confident that the Soviet Union would not dare risk interfering with the coming operation. At 18:23 hours the 14th of July Eisenhower directed that the first echelons of the American Intervention Force arrive at Beirut 09:00 hours on the following day. Eisenhower announced his decision on national television while the specified command had been given by the Commander of the Sixth Fleet, Commander Holloway, at 1600 hours to establish a beachhead at Beirut(16). On July 16, the first of l4, 357 troops landed in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Eisenhower’s special envoy, Robert Murphy, worked out a solution: General Fuad Chehab, the Commander of the Lebanese Army, became an acceptable candidate to succeed Chamoun. However, after the crisis, Lebanon withdrew its adherence to the Eisenhower doctrine, shifting its position to a non-aligned status. Washington accepted that policy shift and withdrew all its forces by October 25, l958. Two lessons from the Lebanese intervention were learned in Washington. One, the United States should not be too closely identified with individual factions in Lebanese politics. This lesson has been ignored twice – in 1967 and in 1983. The second lesson was a warning that“to be cast in the role in Nasser’s opponent would be to leave the Soviets his champion.”(17)

**War and Terror Diplomacy**

The 1967 disheartening Arab defeat and the ensuing bilateral peace offer persuaded many Palestinians that the Arab states were willing to sacrifice their cause. This was the start of a period of heightened violence conducted by groups from Al-Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The mistrust between the Palestinians and the Arab states created a major problem for Jordan. The PLO had become a virtual state within a state. In September 1970, King Hussein decided to root out the Palestinian guerillas. Syria, in a show of support for the Palestinians, sent an armored brigade into Jordan. Kissinger urged Israel to support Jordan, but before it could enter the conflict, the Syrian force was repulsed. Less than year later, Jordanian forces massacred Palestinians in several encounters, forcing the PLO to move to Lebanon where the Palestinian leadership won a formal recognition to the right to operate autonomously as a guerilla force against Israel. Harassment of  the Palestinians by the Lebanese Christians, coupled with several attacks mounted against Israel from Lebanon, preceded massive Israeli raid inside Lebanon which caused hundreds of deaths of civilian Lebanese and Palestinians. Meanwhile, the US policy was centered on the regional security and possible peace breakthrough rather than on Lebanon’s security and well-being. The Lebanese opposition and left wing movement along with the Palestinian leadership accused Kissinger of planning to destroy Lebanon for the benefit of Israeli security. After the war of 1973, Kissinger was too busy managing a ceasefire between Israel and Egypt and a disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria. At that time, the United States voted for a Security Council resolution condemning Israel for a large raid into Lebanon, but Israel’s anger with the vote prompted a reversal; Washington pledged to support future raids. The US pledge created a special relationship between the two countries. The PLO had been approved as the sole representative of the Palestinians at the 1974 Arab summit, and in November 1974 PLO Chairman Yassar Arafat was asked to address the United Nations Assembly. The US and Israel voted against the invitation. The Lebanese President Suleiman Frangieh was asked by the Arab summit to speak at the General Assembly session on behalf of all Arab states. The American diplomacy expressed its dismay and tried to convince the Lebanese president not to go to New York. During the first year of Carter’s presidency, the United States and the Soviet Union shifted gears from the Kissinger diplomacy and jointly outlined a plan for a comprehensive solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The plan included Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab land, a resolution of the Palestinian issue, and normalization of relations between Israel and the United States with international guarantees provided by the superpowers. The Arab states welcomed the offer while Israel rejected both a reconvention of the Geneva conference and PLO participation in any peace effort. In March 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon ostensive to retaliate PLO attacks. The Israeli’s purpose, in reality, was to establish a security zone under the supervision of a Lebanese guerilla group headed by Major Saad Haddad. Carter formerly requested that Israel leave Lebanon, and the administration proposed a UN Security Council resolution to that effect. Israel withdrew its forces in July, but kept its control over parts of South Lebanon using Haddad’s militia. The US arranged a ceasefire with the PLO which held until Israel decided to invade Lebanon in 1982.

**US Diplomacy and the Civil War**

From Ford to Reagan, the US consistently declared support for Lebanon’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. In 1975 and 1976, President Ford and his administration were deeply involved, brokering and maintaining ceasefires, trying to find an acceptable solution to the conflict. Early in the crisis, Ford sent Ambassador Dean Brown to engage all parties and try to reach a workable solution. In reality, these efforts were partial; however, no comprehensive or approach to end Lebanon’s problems were ever realized. While the Ford administration was working to stabilize the government, it realized the necessity of not becoming deeply involved in the crisis. The US administration realized that there were three levels that were at work in the crisis. Restrictively domestic distribution of power represented the first level. The second level involved determining how to transform the confessional system into a secular democracy. The conservative Christians and moderate Moslems wanted to preserve the status quo, while the left-wing movement wanted to secularize the state. The great surprise was that Syria supported the moderates in preserving the status quo. The Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad wanted to increase Syria’s influence by having full control of the Lebanese government as well as the Palestinian leadership. While the Ford administration was counseling restraints on both Israel and Syria, it was not opposed to Israel sending arms to the Christians. Secretary of State Kissinger stated, “The Christians are getting arms from Israel which we do not oppose since it helps maintain the balance.” (18)(The balance of power between radical Lebanese groups and the Christians.) At this point, the US was not opposed to Syrian intervention in Lebanon since it served US interests in preserving a pro-Western government in Lebanon. The Ford administration, however, was very much aware of the long-term implications. Syria was to become the dominant power in the region. The third level of the Lebanese crisis centered on the dynamics of inter-Arab relations which was more complex than the two other levels and posed major challenges for US policy makers. The policy makers saw a great controversy in the positions of Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia towards what was going on in Lebanon and in the future of Lebanon as well as that of the PLO. What brought a greater complexity to Lebanon’s problem was Kissinger’s grand strategy in the Middle East: he once stated, “My country’s history, Mr. President, tells us that it is possible unity while cherishing diversity, that common action is possible despite the variety of races, interests and beliefs we see here in this chamber. Progress and peace and justice are attainable. So we say to all peoples and governments: Let us fashion together a new world order.” (19)Under this grand strategy policy, Lebanon was integrally connected to the search for Middle East peace. Kissinger showed this grand strategy in Lebanon as an extension of the Arab Israeli conflict. What was evident was that the US administration was more concerned about preventing a wider Arab-Israeli conflict through the Lebanon gate. All their attempts were focused on preventing Israel and Syria from colliding over Lebanon.

The Syrian military intervention in Lebanon was welcomed by the US and Israel. However, it was not well received by Egypt, Iraq, Libya and the Palestinians. Many perceived Syria’s military intervention as being as a grand conspiracy led by Henry Kissinger. Under this grand scheme, Syrian troops would end the PLO in Lebanon against Israel giving back the Golan Heights to Syria and the West Bank back to Jordan. Lebanon came under the complete control of Syria, but the promised security never materialized. Henry Kissinger’s influence came to an abrupt end when President Jimmy Carter took office in 1977. The United States’ new policy moved further away from stabilizing Lebanon to concentrating its efforts on regional peace making. Immediately, the Carter administration embarked on a plan for a comprehensive peace concentrating on three principles: peace between Israel and neighboring states, security arrangements for all parties, and a solution to the Palestinian problem. All three principles were dubbed as the ‘trinity of peace’: borders, security, and solution for the Palestinian problem. Under the US regional focus the civil war in Lebanon escalated with the Israeli army invading Southern Lebanon in 1978. The Carter administration supported the deployment of a UN force in South Lebanon, but little success was achieved. The Carter administration was in reality unable to cope with the Lebanese crisis. Carter attached more importance to the ‘human rights’ issue than to stopping the killing in Lebanon. In the meantime, Israel occupied most of South Lebanon. It organized a proxy Lebanese militia without any objection from the US. On the other hand, Syria achieved almost a total occupation of the rest of Lebanon and was determined to gain hegemony over Lebanese politics. The situation became more complicated after a peace treaty was signed between Egypt and Israel, especially with Syria coming forward to assume a leading position in the rejection front – considering its upper hand on both the Palestinians and the Lebanese politics.

**Reagan and the Policy of Greater Change**

Reagan blamed the Soviet Union for the spread of unrest in many continents, and he was dedicated to preventing the Soviets from gaining the upper hand in Europe and the Middle East. In Europe, Reagan introduced missiles with nuclear warheads that could reach the Soviet Union while on embarking on research and development of a strategic defense initiative to neutralize Soviet missiles. In the Middle East, this meant military and economic support to governments willing to ally with the United States. In the early 80’s, the Lebanese government became closely identified with accepting such US support. Reagan’s new policy made stability in Lebanon as synonymous to Arab-Israeli peace making. A lasting peace would start with achieving stability in Lebanon. Reagan was also committed to bringing democracy back to Lebanon and guarding it from Soviet as well as Syrian influence. (20)Sharon, as the Minister of Defense of the Begin government, sought to benefit from this shift in the US policy towards Lebanon; he convinced Alexander Haig, the Secretary of State, of a grand strategy which would destroy the PLO in Lebanon, drive the Syrians out of the country and put in place a government in Beirut which would accept to sign a peace treaty with Israel. When the Israeli army arrived in Beirut in 1982, the US, France and Italy sent their troops to oversee the evacuation of Palestinian forces. Several events shocked Reagan’s plan for Lebanon: first, the assassination of President-elect – Bachir Gemayel; second, the massacre committed in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatilla; and third, the intransigence of Israeli demands for security arrangements. The new, shaky situation in Beirut forced the US, France, Italy and Britain to send a multi-national force to help stabilize the situation and restore order. In 1983, the Reagan administration – through the shuttle diplomacy of the Secretary of State Shultz and the efforts deployed by Ambassador Phillip Haddid came very close to forging an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty. In fact, an agreement was signed on May 17th by the two countries. Israeli withdrawal, however, was contingent upon the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Syria refused such conditions and prepared a counter-offensive campaign against the Israeli occupation. It was clear that Syria was decided to stay in Lebanon. For the Reagan administration, Lebanon’s sovereignty rested with the Lebanese government led by a Phalange President, Amine Gemayel. Moslems, Jews and other Christian factions were, therefore, seen as on the ‘wrong’ side. The Reagan administration came to support Gemayel’s government. The US support for the Christian president was not seen as support for Lebanese sovereignty, but, rather, as support for a Christian-rightwing Phalange president. On April 18th, 1983, the US embassy was bombed by Lebanese allies of Iran. Syrian involvement was also suspected. Syria and Iran were determined to keep Lebanon in a state of chaos. The embassy bombing killed 63 people, 17 of whom were Americans, 8 being CIA agents. On October 23rd, a suicide bomber drove a delivery truck loaded with explosives to the US marine compound at the Beirut airport. A total of 242 people were killed, among them were 220 US marines, 18 US naval men and 3 Army soldiers and one Lebanese citizen. How did the bombing affect Reagan’s resolve to protect Lebanon’s sovereignty? Lebanon was neglected from that time up until the presidency of George W. Bush. The US had lost interest in trying to stabilize Lebanon and was happy to mandate to the Syrians this task. The only meaningful attempt came in 1996 when the US backed the April understanding to reduce violence being committed against civilians being by both Israelis and Hezbollah on both sides of the Lebanese-Israeli border.

**In the Shadow of Regional Interest**

Lebanon may have had become too difficult as a national security interest with the trauma of the Beirut bombings still fresh in the American public’s mind. George H. Bush (the father) was unwilling to re-engage Lebanon. The US removed itself from influencing Lebanon’s future and left Syria to manage the country including its influencing of the implementation of the Ta’if agreement which ended the civil war. Syria used this mandate to impose its hegemony on Lebanon as a whole. Clinton pledged during his election campaign to assist in Lebanon’s reconstruction. Clinton’s words were simply campaign rhetoric; once in office, he did very little to advance the American-Lebanese mature interests. The only positive decision was when Madeleine Albright lifted the travel ban on Americans to visit Lebanon. The Clinton administration was stuck with the Arab-Israeli peace process and did not find any interest in dealing with the Lebanese cause as a separate case. Almost ten years after the Beirut bombings, the Clinton administration was still unwilling to consider Lebanon as a US interest and to get involved in freeing it from Syrian tutelage. The US Congress took the lead, and some legislators of Lebanese descent took on the responsibility to bring Lebanon’s cause forward. Intense lobbying by Lebanese American groups resulted in congressional hearings. Many of the people called to witness before the Congress argued for US engagement in the reconstruction of Lebanon and urged Congress to help restore its sovereignty. In the 1997 hearing, David Welch from the State Department argued, “US policy towards Lebanon remains firmly committed to its unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.”(21)It was, however, from the State Department’s point of view up to Lebanon to work for its own political reforms and objectives through reconstruction and national reconciliation “while the US continues to work hard to achieve a comprehensive, regional peace and to help Lebanon to recover from civil war.” (22)Mr. Welch seemed to suggest in his testimony that there was no immediate need to assist Lebanon at the expense of the US regional strategy to achieve peace. When asked about Syria’s violation of the Ta’if Accord, Welch’s answer suggested that the US was not ready to engage Lebanon for fear of alienating Syria and losing its support towards the peace process. The Clinton administration’s efforts to advance the peace process through Syria came to an end after a failed summit between Clinton and Hafez Al-Assad in Geneva in March 2000. The unilateral withdrawal of Israel from South Lebanon in May of 2000 was supposed to remove the main pretext for the Syrian military to stay in Lebanon. Nonetheless, the Clinton administration put no pressure on Syria to undertake such a task. Representative Michael Forbes introduced in June 1999 the Lebanon Independence Restoration Act HR2056. It proposed to establish US policy “regarding the necessity of requiring the full withdrawal of all Syrian military, security, intelligence and proxy forces from Lebanon and the restoration of Lebanon’s independence.”(23)The proposal did not become law that year but laid the foundation for the Syria accountability and the Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003, signed to become public law in December 2003 under George W. Bush’s administration.

**Bush’s Forward Strategy for Freedom**

Early in its first term, the Bush administration seemed poised to follow previous US policy towards Lebanon. It looked as if Washington was ready to accept Syria’s hegemony over Lebanon. In 2001, Secretary of State Colin Powel cancelled his visit to Beirut after meeting with the Syrian president to discuss the situation in Lebanon. This decision to cancel his trip was seen by the Lebanese government as a US attempt to court Syria for its support in building a coalition against Saddam Hussein. The US foreign policy changed dramatically after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The Bush administration had all the justification to pursue a new strategy and wage global war on terrorism. To protect national security, the Bush administration advocated a policy which included the right of America to use unilateral, pre-emptive wars. This strategy was labeled as the ‘Bush Doctrine’ and aimed to fight terrorism with the right to attack states sponsoring terrorists. In parallel, the national security strategy had another goal – to promote freedom and democratic reforms. The new policy was based on political morality and seemed to be aiming to greatly affect the future of the Middle East and Lebanon. The Bush Doctrine promised to support democratic rule, advance freedom, and increase emphasis on economic and social reforms. The new Bush strategy provided justification for US military intervention to fight global terrorism and bring down hostile governments. Along with this policy, Bush expressed his resolve to create two states in Palestine – one Israeli and one Palestinian, living side by side in peace. For Lebanon, the Bush administration chose a new path for its relation with Lebanon. The September 11 attacks constituted the point of departure from old policies towards Lebanon by taking on terrorism. The approach towards Lebanon of ‘cut and run’ was to be reversed. Colin Powell stated in May 2003 that Lebanon could be a model for democracy and free trade in the region and that the US supported an independent and prosperous Lebanon, free of all foreign forces. (24)Powell also stated that there had to be another track in the Middle East peace process in addition to the track that was laid out in the road map and that that track would deal with Syrian concerns and Lebanese concerns and Lebanon would become an integral part of a comprehensive peace approach(25). Meanwhile, the US Congress continued to be engaged in shaping US policy towards Lebanon. More congressional hearings were held, including one in 2003 when General Michel Aoun was invited to be the key witness. The result was the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act 2003 which was signed into public law No. 108-175. This law aims to halt Syria’s support for terrorism and its occupation of Lebanon, cease its illegal importation of Iraqi oil and hold Syria accountable for its acts in the region. Together with France, the US sponsored UN Security Council 1559 calling for the strict respect of Lebanon’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence under the sole and exclusive authority of the Lebanese government. The resolution also called for safeguarding the Constitution and stopping any constitutional amendment to extend President’s Lahoud’s term(26). Despite the 1559 Resolution, Lebanon’s Parliament voted under Syrian pressure to amend the Constitution to permit the extension of Lahoud’s term by three years. Walid Jumblat and his parliamentarian block were the only people to vote against the amendment. The geo-strategic importance of Lebanon brought forward again by the Bush administration presented Lebanon as offering strategic opportunities for the US with the possibility of strengthening the US strategic position and widening the US influence in the Levant and in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as serving the US strategy in the global war on terrorism. A stable and democratic Lebanon with a free market economy would have a potential role to play between the West and the whole Middle East. If the US were to carry out its commitment towards spreading democracy and open market economy, Lebanon would be the best candidate for achieving this role. Many scholars have argued that US failure to confront terrorism after the 1983 Beirut bombing emboldened terrorists as to the use of terrorist tactics. Scott Dodd and Peter Smolowitz stated that while the “Beirut bombing taught the United States more about protecting the troops and picking the battles.” Dodd and Smolowitz quoted John Lehman, the Secretary of the Navy during 1983 saying, “There is no question it was a major cause of the 9/11, and we told the world that terrorism could succeed.”(27)Until operation “Enduring Freedom” in Afghanistan in 2001, US responses to terrorism were minimum and reflected a ‘cut and run’ policy. The Bush administration’s actions after the 9/11 bombing changed that pattern and made it clear that the United States and its president are drawing a clear line between who is on the US side and who is on the other side. This policy created an opportunity for Lebanon which paved the way to a new US path of engagement and made it imperative for the Bush administration to look at Lebanon as an important asset in its new strategy in the Middle East. The Bush administration identifies two controversial issues confronting its new policy towards Lebanon. Both issues are directly related to the global war on terrorism: the first is Hezbollah which was widely linked to the Beirut bombing of 1983, and the second is the implementation of the Syria Accountability Act of 2003 after it had been signed by President Bush into law. The US State Department identifies Iran and Syria as states sponsoring terrorism. Both states are widely linked to Lebanon through terrorist elements and Hezbollah are causing to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage may be “the ‘A’ team of terrorism,” not Al-Qaeda(28). On the other hand, the Lebanese government insists Hezbollah is not a terrorist organization; Hezbollah a political party and contends its purpose is to fight against the Israeli occupation. No one can deny that Hezbollah was the major force that forced the Israelis to withdraw their forces from South Lebanon in May 2000. Hezbollah proved itself again as a capable military force, fighting the Israeli attack on Lebanon in July and August in 2006. Besides, Hezbollah has a political block in today’s parliament and has been represented by two ministers in the Siniora government. After 2003, Iraq became the center of the Bush administration’s national security strategy. The US strategy was based on the assumption of turning Iraq into a model democratic state and that the democracy in Iraq would be spilling over into the other states in the region. However, things in Iraq did not follow that pattern. The Bush administration felt the urgent need of an alternative to the failed strategy in Iraq. This alternative was centered on Lebanese independence and transition to democracy. Democratizing Lebanon would be more expedient and realistic objective to achieve. Such a task requires to, first, free Lebanon from Syrian hegemony and, second, to build a stable and democratic Lebanese government. Taking advantage of a rare confluence of events and international interests, President Bush has focused US efforts on one clause of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 – the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon – as the first order of business.

The assassination of the former Prime Minister Hariri in 2005 and the subsequent great popular gathering in Beirut on March 14th gave the Bush administration a golden opportunity to use Lebanon as an alternative for the elusive victory in Iraq. US policy towards Lebanon after the Syrian military withdrawal in April 2005 rested on four pillars.

1. Respond favorably to the popular call of the 14th of Marchto help identifying the killers of Rafiq Hariri through an international investigation ordered by the United Nations Security Council.

2. Establish a new democratically elected government in Beirut.

3. Implement the UNSCR #1559 relating to dissolving anddisarming Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, including Hezbollah.

4. Contain the Iranian and Syrian influence in Lebanon, toinclude their local proxies, to provide stability and security necessary for carrying out all needed reforms and reconstruction in Lebanon. Washington seized on the elections to form a new Lebanese parliament. These elections were accomplished under international observation and were qualified “free and fair.” The Bush administration welcomed the Lebanese government led by Fouad Siniora as a symbol of what it described as a democratization wave sweeping the Middle East. After last summer’s war, the US administration made stabilizing the Siniora government a cornerstone of its Middle East strategy. US policy in Lebanon has increasingly placed the Bush administration on a collision course with Syria. For the last two years the US has pushed through the United Nations Security Council several resolutions concerning the stability of Lebanon and the formation of an international tribunal to try suspects in Mr. Hariri’s assassination. Damascus has expressed its objection and dismay about the US policy and has denied any involvement in Mr. Hariri’s murder or in destabilizing Lebanon through trafficking arms across the border or through its support to terrorist organizations inside Lebanon. In recent weeks, Lebanese and US officials have accused Syria of backing Sunni radicals and Palestinian militant groups within Lebanon in a bid to undermine the Siniora government. Clashes between the Lebanese Army and these militias in Tripoli Nahr Al Barid camp and Saida have left hundreds dead. Syria denies it has been supporting the unrest. The Bush administration decided to increase its military aid to Lebanon which will be raised from 40 million dollars of last year up to 220 million dollars for 2007. The US and Lebanon are working to find new ways to secure the Syrian-Lebanese border and to prevent the infiltration of more militants and arms. For the US administration, the most important test will remain on how to apply the required disarmament of all militias, to include Hezbollah, and how to apply the requirements for the Lebanese Army to extend its authority over the entire country. Recognizing the difficulty of achieving these objectives all at once, it is important to prioritize the various elements of this argument, taking into consideration what has already been achieved through the implementation of the UNSCR #1701 and the success of the army in controlling the Nahr Al-Barid camp and the dismantling of various terrorist cells in Lebanon. The near term objectives of disarmament should focus on ending Hezbollah’s operating as an independent force outside of government control. Such a task should be undertaken by the government through a national initiative to incorporate the Hezbollah militia as an independent brigade within the Lebanese military command structure by enacting the “Al Ansar Law” of 1958. Achieving this phase of Hezbollah disarmament requires liberating Hezbollah leadership from Iranian and Syrian hegemony, a very difficult task to achieve. In the meantime, the US, Europe, and the international community should make it clear to Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran that any attempt to repeat the 1983 terrorist acts would be unwise. Such attempts would result in bringing ashore thousands of troops to back existing UNIFIL to forcefully eradicate all terrorist elements total in Lebanon. There are, of course, other ways to address the disarmament of Hezbollah and other militias in Lebanon. Such an operation may include the following: A change of focus in implementing 1701 to include searching for arms caches. The deployment of monitors and troops along the Lebanese borders with Syria, various seaports and Beirut airport to enforce UN security resolutions. Legislating new laws prohibiting political parties from having or supporting armed militias or conducting any security activities as these remain the sole responsibility of the elected government.

**New Policy Shifts**

American journalist Seymour M. Hersh wrote on March 5, 2007 in the New Yorker an article titled “The Redirection” in which he claimed, “In the past few months as the situation in Iraq has deteriorated, the Bush administration, both in its public diplomacy and its covert operations has significantly shifted its Middle East strategy. The “redirection,” as some inside the White House have called the new strategy, has brought the United States closer to an open confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the Administration has cooperated with Saudi Arabia’s government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shiite organization that is backed by Iran. The

U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iranand its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.”(29). The claims made in Hersh’s article make one wonder if the United States is giving up on its tactic of “constructive instability” which was still part of its policy during the Israeli war in Lebanon in July 2006. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice gave new, broad outlines of the US policy towards the Middle East before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January 2007, and she stated that there is “a new strategic alignment in the Middle East,” and separated “reformers and extremists,” putting Iran, Syria and Hezbollah on the other side of that divide. She said, “They have made their choice, and their choice is to destabilize the region.” (30)President Bush, in a speech on January 10, approved her approach, saying, “These two regimes – Iran and Syria – are allowing terrorists and insurgents to use their territory to move in and out of Iraq.”(31)It seems the Bush administration is giving up its initial strategy on the war on terror. The terms of unilateralism, pre-emptive war, constructive instability, or drawing a ‘new map’ of the Middle East are seldom heard. The new shift in policy aims towards adopting a three-prong strategy. Within this strategy Lebanon does not represent an isolated case but becomes one element of a grand scheme covering the whole Middle East. The three-prong strategy consists of the following:

1. Draw a line between friends and opponents – or reformersand extremists - as a first step towards creating a new coalition capable of meeting, globally, the threat imposed by the Iranian-Syrian alliance. The United States has brought Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority and Israel into a new strategic embrace to face all the challenges imposed by Iran, Syria and their proxies in the region. The United States is working on disrupting the Iranian and Syrian challenges on many fronts at the same time. This confrontation covers Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territory. There is a clear linkage between what is going on in all three theatres where the focus remains on defeating Iranian and Syrian proxies through the use of all political, military and Economic means provided by the US and its regional and European allies.

2. Emphasize pluralism rather than unilateralism. The UnitedStates has clearly given up on unilateralism and has decided to work from within the scope of international legitimacy in dealing with Iran and Syria and their proxies. The Administration’s concern about Iran’s nuclear program was taken as a global issue to be dealt inside the United Nations institutions. The matter was described to threaten Iran’s neighbors and other nations around the world. The Bush administration has mobilized the Gulf states, Jordan, Egypt, Israel and Europe to express their worries about the Iranian weapons of mass destruction. The Security Council resolutions such as l559, l595, 1701 and those related to imposing sanctions on Iran form an integral part of this strategy.

3. Keep a US military presence in the region to deter anypotential new threat posed by the Iranian-Syrian alliance, its proxies, or any terror group. This policy was reassessed lately to improve the security situation inside Iraq as well as to have a show of force in the Arabian Gulf as a part of coercive diplomacy towards Iran to deter their Interference inside Iraq and to pressure the Iranian leadership to give up on its nuclear ambitions. The US support and military assistance provided to Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and Iraq fall within this strategic option. The increasingly confrontational stance taken by the Bush administration and the Lebanese government towards Syria also falls within this option. In recent weeks, Lebanese and US officials accused Syria of backing Sunni and Palestinian militant groups inside Lebanon. The army operation in the Nahr Al-Barid camp served this purpose indirectly.

**Conclusions**

In the years following the 1983 Beirut bombings, US policy towards Lebanon changed from full support for Lebanon’s sovereignty to acquiescing to Syrian hegemony over the country. Faced with the possibility of confronting terrorism, the US preferred to follow a cautious approach by withdrawing its forces and its support to the Lebanese authorities. In this process, Lebanon was largely ignored in favor of US interests with Syria. The Bush administration, after 9/11, took the opportunity to deviate from this policy of disengagement and adopted a new policy that would effectively serve Lebanon’s sovereignty and independence as well as US strategic goals. Such a policy would be consistent with the US strategy of spreading democracy and defending human rights in the Middle East. Success in Iraq is proving to be elusive and Lebanon would be a more expedient and realistic candidate to achieve a democratic and economic change. Lebanon has a democratic legacy and has the basic institutions necessary for democratization. The withdrawal of Syrian troops was not enough to ensure the stability and freedom of Lebanon. Syria has many proxies to hinder the democratic and reform process undertaken by the Siniora government. Hezbollah constitutes the main Iranian and Syrian proxy; disarming it represents a priority for Lebanon and the US strategy. Lebanon certainly has the potential to become a model for democracy more than Iraq does. A stable and democratic Lebanon with a free market economy would serve as a potential intermediary between the Middle East and the West.

1. Douglas Little, “American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945”, Chapel Hill: University N.C. Press, 2002, 23.

2. Little, 124.

3. Engin Akarli further argues that it was French intervention in Lebanese politics that actually hampered efforts for a secular Lebanese nationality. More of these arguments are in his book, The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920.

4. The quote is taken from the introduction to the “National Security Strategy of the United States.”

5. President Ronald Reagan’s televised speech to the nation, September 1, 1982.

6. Donald N. Eveland, Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into the Middle East in 1956, Brattleboro,Vt: Aman Boods, 1988.

7. Lenczowski, American Presidents and the Middle East, 44.

8. Sheldon L. Richman, “Ancient History: US Conduct in the Middle East since WWII,” in Magnus, 87­91, Available:http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-159.html

9. Eveland, 250.

10. Michael Bishku, “The 1958 American Intervention in Lebanon: A Historical Assessment,” Arab Affairs 31 (Winter 89-90): 108.

11. Ambrose, Eisenhower , 463.

12. Qubain, Crisis in Lebanon, Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 1961), 60-66.

13. Ibid.

14. Resolution of UN Security Council, June 11, 1988 on Lebanon – “Not War, but Like War” Leavenworth paper No. 3 by Roger Spiller, Available: http://www.cgsc.army.mil/carl/ resources/csi/spiller2/spiller2

15. Robert McClintock, “American Landing in Beirut,” 69.

16. Jack Schulimson, “Marines in Lebanon” Marine Corps History pamphlet (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1966).

17. National Security Council Document 1958, No.5820/1 quoted in “Ancient History: US Conduct in theMiddle East Since WWII,” Available: http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-159

18. National Security Council Meeting Minutes, April 7, 1976 – Declassified.

19. From Henry Kissinger’s speech before the General Assembly of the United Nations, October 1975.

20. “Reagan World,” interview cited in Karen Elliott House, Wall Street Journal (June 3, 1980): 1

21. Taken from the text of the “Hearing on US Policy towards Lebanon” before the Committee on International Relations, HR, June 25, 1997.

22. Ibid.

23. H.R. 2056, June 8, 1999.

24. Powell’s press briefing, May 3, 2003 in Beirut, Lebanon. The text was published in the Lebanese press and by the US Department of State.

25. Ibid.

26. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, September 2, 2004.

27. Scott Dodd and Peter Smolowitz, “1983 Beirut Bombing Began New Era of Terror” Charlotte Observer, 21 October 2003.

28. Ralph De Toledano, “Hizballah Emerging as the Terrorist A-Team” Insight on the News 20 7 (March 2004) – 20th anniversary of the Beirut’s Bombing on CNN

29. Seymour M. HERSH, “The Redirection” The New Yorker, 5 March 2007.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

**السياسة الأميركية تجاه لبنان: عقبات وتوقعات**

عجزت الولايات المتحدة، على غرار القوى الاستعمارية الأوروبية قبلها، عن تجنب التخبط في النزاعات السياسية في المنطقة. ورغبة منها في إبقاء أفضل المناطق التي تضم أكبر احتياطي عام للنفط بين أيدي صديقة، وبعيداً عن أيدي منافسين محتملين، ولمعارضة المواقف المحايدة في الحرب الباردة، جمعت عدداً قياسياً من المآسي في الشرق الأوسط وأحدثها مأساة احتلال العراق.

لا يمكن امتحان سياسة الولايات المتحدة تجاه لبنان من دون دراسة الأهمية الجيوستراتيجية للشرق الأوسط بالنسبة إلى الولايات المتحدة.

في هذه الدراسة تم استخدام وسيلتين رسميتين لمقاربة هذه المسألة. الوسيلة الأولى هي طريقة وصفية لفهم الموضوع تركز على محاولة فهم التسلسلات المباشرة للأحداث التي أدت إلى نتيجة معينة. وتركز الطريقة الأخرى على التحليل النظري والتاريخي لفهم سبب حصول الأحداث على النحو الذي حدثت به.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-policy-towards-lebanon-hurdles-and-prospect#sthash.ZO9FajF8.dpuf