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Compromised sovereignty: The US takeover of Lebanon

As US influence over Lebanon deepens into overt guardianship – using aid, sanctions, and political pressure to dictate Beirut's every step and utterance – Lebanon's only choice to regain sovereignty is to forge new Eurasian alliances, or remain an American vassal.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

“American hegemony in Lebanon is necessary to ensure the stability of the regional order. Any movement toward decision-making independence could lead to chaos that threatens American interests in the region.” – Joseph Nye

In his 2020 memoir, “A Promised Land,” former US President Barack Obama makes it clear that any shift toward independent political decision-making in West Asia “will have

a profound impact on American interests in the region, as it will weaken our ability to influence global events.”

This mentality, which Obama frames as “diplomacy,” drives US policy in Lebanon, where [maintaining control](#) over Lebanese state institutions has become a critical US objective. Financial aid, sanctions, and conditional military assistance, among other incentives and punishments, are used as levers to steer Beirut’s decisions in line with US regional interests. Those who collaborate – directly or indirectly – with Hezbollah or the Syrian government face the threat of sanctions, a tactic designed to entrench American sway over Lebanese politics.

From diplomacy to declared guardianship

This control increasingly took the form of outright guardianship, especially after Israel launched its military aggression against Lebanon, and with Donald Trump set to return to the White House.

Current US Ambassador to Beirut [Lisa Johnson](#) personified this shift when she recently informed Lebanese political forces and representatives that they must “[prepare for the post-Hezbollah phase](#), as its control over the state, its institutions, and the state’s border crossings are no longer permitted to continue.”

The US diplomat declared that the Lebanese resistance movement had grown “very weak” after a series of major setbacks, including the assassination of longtime secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, and is reported as saying that “there is a new political era that the country will witness soon, in which Hezbollah will have no place.”

Johnson's public statements are contradictory, to say the least. Only months earlier, on 27 June, during a ceremony at the US Embassy, she claimed that “the conflict has continued long enough” and that from President Joe Biden on down, everyone at the embassy was focused on preventing further escalation and finding a diplomatic resolution.

But as Israeli military operations [expanded in Lebanon](#) and Trump won a landslide victory in the US elections, that facade of diplomacy quickly fell away. It became apparent that US policy was primarily geared toward supporting Tel Aviv's military objectives while firmly asserting Washington's dominance over Lebanon – without any meaningful pushback from Lebanese political or military leaders.

Compliance and compromise in Lebanese institutions

The Lebanese state, including its military and security services, have not resisted the US encroachment on Lebanon's sovereignty, and have sometimes tripped over themselves to meet US demands – however intrusive. In one recent example, after MP Waddah al-Sadiq

claimed in a televised interview that there are “doors at Beirut airport through which only Hezbollah members enter or exit, and the same applies to the port of Beirut,” the Lebanese authorities allowed a US military attaché to inspect the airport to assess Hezbollah’s absence for himself.

That incident coincided with the unauthorized and unlicensed US construction of a passage from the sea road near Dbayeh's Al-Fahd Barracks, despite occurring in a tightly monitored Lebanese security zone. The US embassy later justified the project as preparation for the potential evacuation of its nationals, but the implicit approval from Lebanese military command speaks volumes about their inability – or unwillingness – to resist American requests.

The Americans also exert influence over Lebanese airspace. US officials [blocked an Iranian civilian aircraft](#) from entering and even barred an Iraqi aid plane from landing until it passed through Jordan. Even the country’s national carrier, Middle East Airlines, “[The most badass airline on the planet](#),” complied with a request from the US Embassy in September not to transport anyone injured in the Beirut strikes, fearful of potential repercussions for being the last remaining airline operating out of Beirut's Rafiq Hariri Airport.

But the reach of the American ambassador extends well beyond military affairs into Lebanese politics. Johnson last month led a diplomatic campaign, alongside other Arab and foreign ambassadors, to ensure that the current Lebanese security and military leadership would stay in place – despite their tenures ending – holding meetings with Parliament Speaker [Nabih Berri](#) and caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati to secure their support.

The fragile position of the Lebanese military

Johnson, who had previously worked as embassy staff in Beirut between 2002 and 2004, draws from her intimate knowledge of Lebanese politics and has built a broad network of relationships. In a [speech](#) before the US Congress in May, she highlighted bipartisan support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Homeland Security Forces, describing them as “trusted partners in maintaining Lebanon’s stability.”

Since 2006, these “trusted partners” have received nearly three billion US dollars in aid, ostensibly “to strengthen Lebanon’s sovereignty, mitigate instability, disrupt terrorist groups, and counter Hezbollah’s false narrative that its illicit weapons and fighters are necessary to defend Lebanon.” It is a failed project, as Hezbollah reliably wins the majority of votes cast in Lebanese national elections.

If anything, the statement evokes memories of the [2010 Odaisseh incident](#), where Israeli forces fired on a Lebanese army patrol near the Blue Line, resulting in the death of two Lebanese soldiers and an Israeli soldier, prompting a tense UN intervention.

The Lebanese army's move at that time was within the framework of implementing Resolution 1701, which required the withdrawal of the Israeli army beyond the Blue Line, and allowed the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Lebanese army to deploy in the region and implement Joint patrols.

In the aftermath, the US Embassy summoned then-army commander Jean Kahwaji to inquire about the details of the incident, verify the type of weapons used, and review whether they were among the weapons and ammunition provided by Washington.

Resisting US guardianship

Despite this aid, the Lebanese military is ill-equipped to protect Lebanese sovereignty. The recent Batroun incident, in which an Israeli naval force entered Lebanese waters, [kidnapped a naval captain](#) residing in the northern Lebanese city, and then left without facing even a statement of condemnation from the Lebanese army, demonstrates the degree to which Lebanon's defense capabilities remain compromised.

At the beginning of this year, the Lebanese army received an American donation worth \$25 million, including sentries and speedboats, as part of “cooperation between the Lebanese and American armies.”

Johnson says this aid comes in the context of supporting the capabilities of the Lebanese army to raise its level and enable it to protect the maritime borders. However, the relationship has proven one-sided, characterized by Lebanese compliance with US directives – including unauthorized foreign activities on Lebanese soil.

Aside from the US-backed-and-armed Israeli military assault on its people, [heritage](#), and territory, Lebanon finds itself struggling to protect itself from American hegemony amid fears of economic sanctions, especially as the country still grapples with a devastating financial crisis.

There are steps the Lebanese state can take – at least in part – to shield itself from such domination, with the diversification of international relations a crucial starting point in reasserting sovereignty. Strengthening ties with Eurasian powers [China and Russia](#) could reduce Lebanon's reliance on American support and counterbalance external pressures.

Building an independent Lebanon

Recent years have seen several key economic projects obstructed due to US barriers – initiatives that Lebanon would have been able to freely pursue through balanced

diplomacy. By engaging with nations not hostile to the US, Lebanon can diversify its alliances, creating opportunities for genuine economic partnerships instead of dependence on aid crumbs from Washington.

In the medium to long term, Beirut must focus on two fundamental areas: rebuilding a strong, more self-sufficient economy, and strengthening its constitutional, democratic, judicial, and executive institutions to increase domestic transparency and thus reduce vulnerability to foreign interference.

The more Lebanon relies on its internal economic strength, the less it will have to fear international pressure. Conversely, the weaker the economy, the more susceptible the country becomes.

Strengthening popular support for state decisions, involving civil society, and tapping into the influence of the large Lebanese diaspora are crucial steps in amplifying Lebanon's voice on the global stage. It is only through an independent, self-reliant approach that Lebanon can overcome the burdens of foreign domination, restore its agency, and ensure a future free from guardianship – a future where the Lebanese people determine their own destiny.

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