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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

October, 29 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Janet L. Yellen  
Secretary of Treasury  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Yellen,

We write to express our ongoing concern over the political and economic crisis facing Lebanon and to urge the administration to complement the European Union's announced sanctions framework to push Lebanese leaders to take difficult but important steps to help their country. The recent formation and parliamentary approval of Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government was a welcome step. However, with parliamentary elections expected next year, we remain concerned about the ability of this government and future governments to take measures and institute reforms that will help ordinary Lebanese cope with the country's unprecedented financial collapse and the continuing physical, financial, and emotional toll inflicted by the August 4, 2020, explosion at the Port of Beirut.

The United States has publicly supported international efforts to help Lebanon reform and rebuild its economy in a way that is transparent and supports the Lebanese people; not just entrenched leaders. However, that support requires Lebanon's political leaders to commit to meaningful structural reforms. Unfortunately, Lebanon's political elites have consistently chosen their own narrow interests over the increasingly desperate needs of their fellow citizens. Meanwhile, Iran-backed Hezbollah and its affiliates like the Amal Movement continue to maintain a bloc in parliament that stymies needed government action and undermines the country's ability to enact meaningful economic and social reforms.

We were therefore heartened by the European Union's July 30 announcement that it was standing up a framework to impose sanctions on Lebanese leaders who obstruct or undermine Lebanon's democratic political process. That announcement received renewed support on September 16 when the European Parliament passed a resolution calling for targeted sanctions

against Lebanese politicians who block the progress of the new government by a vote of 571 to 71, with 39 abstentions.

The United States has consistently sanctioned Hezbollah and its affiliates, not only for its terrorist acts, but also for its active participation in the corruption and criminality that has impoverished so many Lebanese. For that reason, we have supported this administration and the previous administration when they have sanctioned Hezbollah and those aligned with it, including the November 6, 2020, designation of Gibran Bassil, the former Lebanese Foreign Minister, Member of Parliament and President of the Free Patriotic Movement, for his role in corruption in Lebanon under the authority of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and Executive order 13818. Yet, we believe there is more that the United States and the European Union can do in concert to counter Hezbollah's malign influence and to ensure that Lebanese leaders uphold this government and take tangible steps to address Lebanon's many challenges. We are also encouraged to see that the U.S. has sanctioned Jihad al-Arab, Dany Khoury and Jamil Sayyed, two Lebanese businessmen and a Member of Parliament for engaging in Lebanon's endemic corruption and for their roles in undermining democracy and the rule of law in Lebanon.

We believe that sanctions work best when they are coordinated internationally and that U.S. sanctions can be brought to bear against those working against democracy, accountability, and reform in Lebanon, especially Hezbollah and its affiliates. To that end, we urge the administration to take steps to complement the EU's announced sanctions framework and to work closely with counterparts both in Brussels and in member-state capitals to coordinate sanctions so that Lebanese leaders, including members and supporters of Hezbollah, fully understand the consequences, including the freezing of any assets subject to U.S. jurisdiction, of their behavior.

As the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we have consistently supported assistance that has aimed to build up trusted Lebanese national institutions like the Lebanese Armed Forces and to provide critical assistance to both the people of Lebanon and the refugee communities that they have generously hosted. The United States must make it clear that it continues to stand ready to help the people of Lebanon, not only through the provision on desperately needed assistance but also by ensuring that Lebanese leaders work on behalf of all Lebanese and that they will face accountability if they do not.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
Chairman



James E. Risch  
Ranking Member