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Policy Memo

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RE: US Policy Toward Lebanon: Stepping Back to Move Forward

A year ago Lebanon was on the verge of an economic and political resurgence. Today policy and security analysts assert that an escalation in violence and sectarianism in Lebanon could result in a conflict that rivals what is currently happening in Iraq and mark a return to civil war.

Averting another crisis in the Middle East seems prudent. Yet the political impasse in Lebanon, the United States' commitments in Iraq, NATO's endeavors in Afghanistan, Iran's emergence as a regional power, and the challenges facing the Middle East peace process have limited US efforts to address the underlying factors contributing to Lebanon's instability.

With these constraints in mind, the Stanley Foundation recently convened a workshop to discuss how the international community might bolster multilateral efforts to effect more *sustainable* stability and security in Lebanon. The discussions were framed by:

- A longer-term policy intent (ten years) to ensure discussions went beyond the current crisis to address underlying issues.
- Analysis and prioritization of the challenges that are most likely to hinder the achievement of mid- to longer-term policy objectives.
- Consideration of multilateral and bilateral policies currently in play that could be bolstered via a larger international or regional commitment and the use of better implementation mechanisms.
- Identification of policy gaps that if filled could lead to more effective policy outcomes.

Critical Challenges

The following three challenges were deemed the greatest threats to sustainable stability and security:

- **Negative foreign intervention.** Lebanon is viewed as a proxy for external interests and even as a "card to play" by external powers to gain leverage in other Middle East negotiations (e.g., US-Syria negotiations over Iraq).

- **Factionalism.** Internal and external actors' competing strategic visions for Lebanon have fragmented the political process, making any kind of coordination or commitment difficult to maintain. Factionalism is also closely tied to the country's lack of a national identity, without which it will be very hard to unite the agendas and concerns of the Lebanese people.
- **Weak state institutions.** Foreign interests, combined with Lebanon's political factionalism and the lack of a national identity, make it difficult to build a strong state without crushing important community identities. A stronger institutional framework is necessary if Lebanon is to function and serve all of its citizens effectively.

A Softer, Multilateral Approach to US Policy

Future US efforts in Lebanon must face the reality of negative perceptions and suspicions generated by US security policies (or perceived lack thereof) toward Lebanon, the larger Levant, and the wider Middle East region. Multilateral policies that limit the direct role of the US government are more likely to meet with acceptance and success. Multilateral efforts should focus on burden-sharing with key allies and international institutions, development assistance, and roles for US civil society organizations and the private sector. This "softer" approach offers the United States an opportunity to effect change that aligns with trends within Lebanese society and with existing international stabilization and reconstruction efforts. At the same time, this approach emphasizes positive attributes of US culture and downplays its perceived militaristic tendencies.

Key Recommendations

Using the contextual frame previously mentioned, the workshop dialogue offered the following recommendations for both the United States and larger international community.

- **Bolster Local, Municipality Programs and Direct Community Support**
The European Union (EU) currently offers programs focusing on local municipalities. The objectives of these programs are to encourage greater accountability and transparency while decreasing corruption. In addition to building local institutional capacity, the projects generate goodwill toward the EU. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) also offers assistance directly to communities.

Given the effectiveness of the current EU programs, the United States should bolster the EU's efforts by offering technical and financial assistance to these existing programs. The United States should also encourage regional institutions such as the GCC and the Arab League to take on similar multilateral community programs.

One caveat is that the United States, United Nations, EU, and other organizations need to answer the question of how aid can also be given through the Lebanese national government to local institutions. While bypassing the Lebanese

government is one way of circumventing the political impasse and corruption at the national level, it can also further weaken already frail central government institutions. A balance needs to be struck between offering direct aid to communities and municipalities and strengthening government institutions.

- **Strengthen the Central Bank**

The Central Bank is one of Lebanon's strongest institutions, is less controversial to support than the military, and helps keep the country unified. Saudi Arabia's past support has met with success; this may offer an avenue for greater multilateral support.

- **Identify Entry Points and Develop Plans for Multilateral Efforts on Security Sector Reform**

Even given its sectarian dynamics, the military is one of the strongest state institutions. Its recent efforts against Fatah al-Islam have met with fairly unified support from the public. Longer-term security sector reform strategies and efforts must be developed and supported if Lebanon's military and police are ever to have the capacity to provide national security.

- **Evaluate the Mandate, Role, and Troop Deployments of UNIFIL**

The mandate is too complex and there are concerns that the important and positive pre-2006 roles performed by UNIFIL—monitoring, conflict prevention, and mediation—are being lost due to a shift in mission focus and in the types of troops deployed. This may ultimately lead to unwillingness on the part of the international community to expand or continue support, especially if there is a significant attack on UNIFIL forces. The United Nations and Lebanese government also need to determine the role UNIFIL should play if attacks occur outside its area of operations, especially in light of possible violence associated with the Hariri tribunal.

- **Support the French and Saudi-Iranian Initiatives**

Initiatives led by French President Sarkozy and Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah are better positioned and more likely to meet with success than other US- or European-led attempts to mediate the conflict and broker a power-sharing deal. Support for these initiatives may also preclude the development of a two-government situation, which seems imminent given the current impasse.

- **Engage Youth Via Ongoing Education and Citizenship Programs**

New organizations sprang up during the Cedar Revolution and after Syria's withdrawal. These organizations still exist but have a lower profile. The international community, especially NGOs, can liaise with these organizations to institute programs that encourage young Lebanese to enter politics and help create a nonsectarian national identity. University exchanges between Lebanon and the United States, involving both students and faculty, should also be supported as a mechanism to engage and educate youth interested in public policy and international affairs.

- Seek Out and Support Private Sector and Civil Society Initiatives to Stimulate the Economy and Private Sector Development**
 Encourage private sector initiatives such as The Partnership for Lebanon, which was launched by five US multinational companies and now includes a Lebanon Online Portal sponsored by the US Chamber of Commerce, and KIVA.org, a grassroots micro-loan portal that connects entrepreneurs with individuals wanting to support small business development.
- Assist Lebanon in a Review of the Taef Agreement**
 Determine if the provisions of the agreement can be decentralized in an effort to reconcile the need for a central government with sectarian and community demands for greater influence.

On June 14, 2007, the Stanley Foundation conducted a workshop entitled "*Levant Security: Lebanon—Will It Be Left Behind?*" The aim of the workshop was to discuss ongoing challenges and current international policies in an effort to determine how the international community could remove impediments to Lebanon's establishment of a secure, sovereign democracy. Participants included policy and security analysts, journalists, and former government representatives from Lebanon, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, Europe, Canada, and the United States.

The workshop is part of the Stanley Foundation's subregional project, *Levant Security*, which was designed to provide sustainable, multilateral solutions to the policy community on the regional security issues facing the Levant states. The project will culminate in a final project report to be published in August 2007. The Levant Security project is one project element in the Stanley Foundation's ongoing, multiyear initiative entitled *US and Middle East Security*. More information on this and other Stanley Foundation initiatives can be found at www.stanleyfoundation.org.

The analysis and recommendations included in this memo do not necessarily reflect the views of the Stanley Foundation or any of the conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward in the dialogues.

For further information, please contact Kathy Gockel or Keith Porter at the Stanley Foundation, 563-264-1500.

About The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance. It brings fresh voices, original ideas, and lasting solutions to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation, located in Muscatine, Iowa, that focuses on peace and security issues and advocates principled multilateralism. The foundation frequently collaborates with other organizations. It does not make grants. Online at www.stanleyfoundation.org.