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Fears of Lebanon turning into a failed state under the pressure of the crisis

Experts warn against Hezbollah's seizure of power

Washington: Heba Al-Qudsi

Lebanese businessmen, academics, and lawmakers expressed their fear of the specter of bankruptcy in Lebanon and its transformation into a failed state, and the seizure of power by Hezbollah, demanding that they search for solutions to address the economic crisis and provide up to \$ 30 billion to avoid this terrible scenario.

These warnings came as leaks indicate the direction of the Trump administration to impose sanctions on former Lebanese ministers and officials from different political directions for their involvement in corruption, abuse of power and money laundering operations, and preparations for these sanctions are under the umbrella of the "Magnitsky Law" (which was approved by the Republican and Democratic Parties In 2012, it authorizes the US government to impose sanctions on human rights violations by freezing assets and funds and preventing them from entering the United States.)

Unconfirmed information indicates that the US Treasury Department is examining the extent of Lebanese officials' involvement in financial dealings with entities subject to US sanctions or classified as terrorist organizations.

At a symposium organized by the Transatlantic Leadership Network in the US House of Representatives the day before yesterday (Friday), entitled "Turmoil in the Middle East, the Role of the United States and Future Scenarios," **Sasha Toperich**, Vice-President of the Center, explained the seriousness of the situation in Lebanon. **Ambassador John Craig**, who worked in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Egypt, pointed to the continuation of the demonstrations for nearly 4 months, the deterioration of the economic situation, the presence of a million and a half million Syrian refugees, in addition to the Iranian and Hezbollah influence in the government.

Marc Malik, director of Conquest Capital, said that Lebanese companies are suffering from the specter of bankruptcy and that by the next two months the government will be unable to pay the salaries of the army, and thus the soldiers will try to find out who can pay their salaries, whether Hezbollah or another party. Malik warned that the maximum pressure campaign the US administration is exerting against Iran

and Hezbollah could increase the party's strength, and if the regime falls in Lebanon, Hezbollah will be the party able to seize power.

Dr. Paul Salem, head of the Washington-based Middle East Center, warned of the humanitarian catastrophe that could happen to Lebanese families and confront the threat of hunger and bankruptcy. He warned against the return of military militias, as happened in the 1970s, and the return of the influence of terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda, in addition to the exodus of Syrian refugees from Lebanon to other neighboring countries. Salem stressed that failure scenarios are bad for everyone, whether for the United States and its foreign policies in the region, or for Lebanon and neighboring countries.

Lebanese MP Neemat Frem presented an analysis of the economic crisis and the low growth rates against the debt rates and the high rates of budget deficits, the high unemployment rates and the spread of corruption, and the increase in the number of employees who cost the budget about 8.5 billion dollars, warning that the economic situation leads to a failed state and to a civil war Others in Lebanon. As for

Professor Habib Charles Malik, Professor of History at the Lebanese American University, he presented an explanation of the social structure and the way in which Hezbollah attracted supporters. He suggested that the United States implement the Magnitsky Act and impose sanctions targeting corrupt Lebanese officials. He pointed out that the sanctions imposed by the United States against the Iranian regime and Hezbollah have had positive results and should be increased.

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