



SECURITY AND ELECTIONS, FIRST AND FOREMOST!

By Ibrahim Jouhari

For the last two years Lebanon has been described as “facing an unprecedented crisis, on the edge of the abyss, teetering on a narrow ledge, ...”. Then as the situation worsened, this shifted to “Lebanon needs a soft or controlled landing, we need to avoid a lost decade, measures need to be taken to escape a hard crash”. Unfortunately, if one just looks outside, or takes a short walk, he will witness the long lines for fuel, the empty pharmacies, and the dark houses devoid of electricity, it has become obvious that we have entered the third phase, “the dreaded crash”.



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There is a significant number of governance theories[1] and measures that deal with crisis management and rebuilding after a crash, with a variety of approaches and strategies. However, all agree that nothing can be accomplished without stability and minimal public order, maintained by a functional security force. Additionally, if the people lose hope in the future of

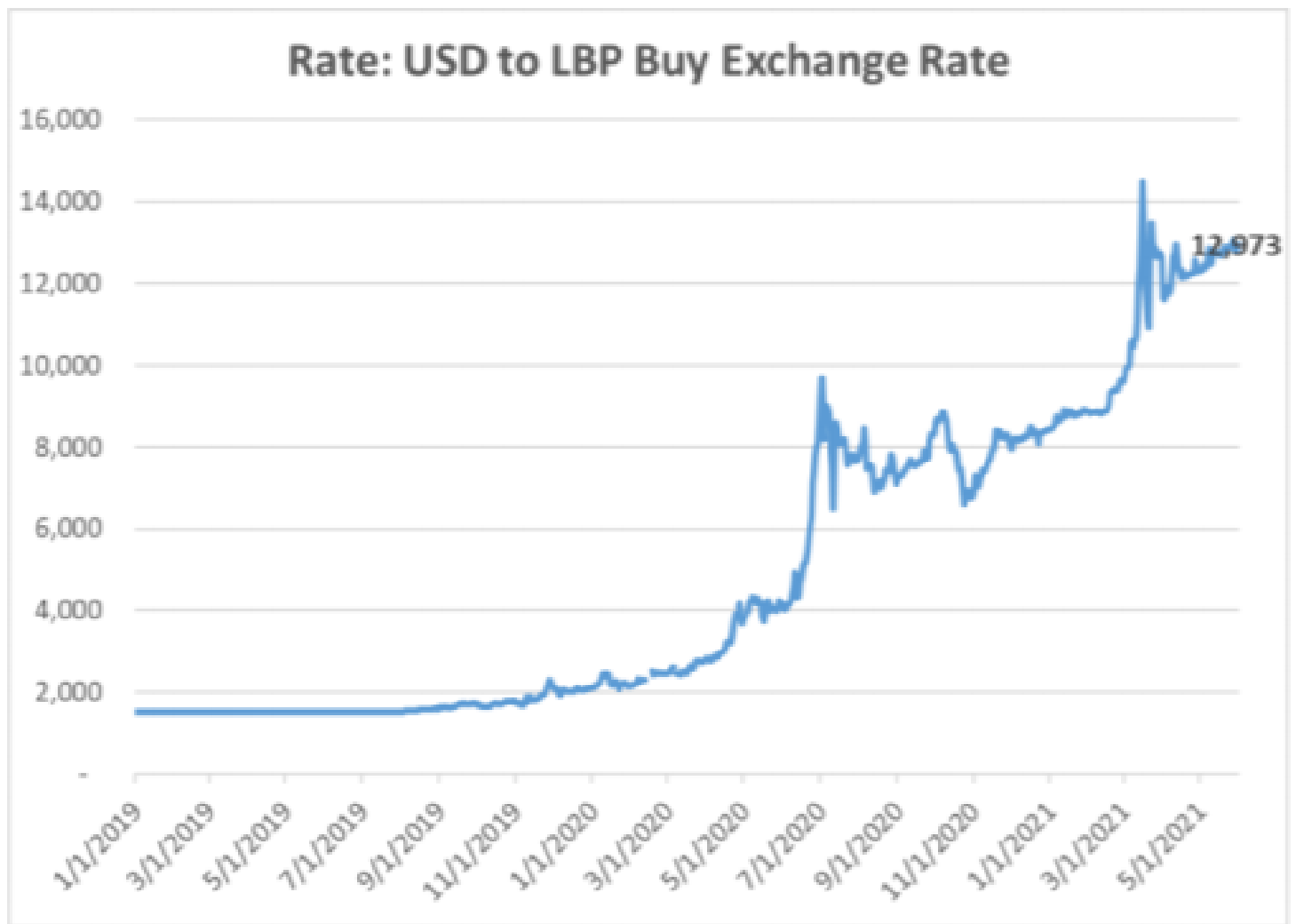


their country, of a better life, of light at the end of the tunnel, then most efforts will be in vain. These days hope is change, hope is an election that materializes the will of thousands and hundreds of thousands of Lebanese that took to the streets calling for change. Hope is the will for political renewal of countless Lebanese who are constantly humiliated in their desperate search for medicine for their children, food, fuel, and electricity. Hope is holding the parliamentary and presidential elections on time, without any delays or postponement.

Therefore, the top two priorities of any foreign initiative or conference must focus on tackling these two crucial issues: maintaining minimally functioning security services and holding elections in 2022. These two ramparts are all that is left standing between preserving a glimmer of hope that might turn into a roaring fire, once the reform and rebuilding process is started, and a failed state that will condemn Lebanon to years of never-ending misery and pain.

Security and Stability

Lebanon is at a crossroads, if public order and security break down, following the fall of the banking sector, currency devaluation, political deadlock, and the breakdown of all public services (electricity, hospitals, fuel shortages), Lebanon will become a failed state[2]. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) are on the brink. The main issue these institutions face is that the loss of the real (USD) value of basic salaries, following the Lebanese Lira devaluation, which fell from 1500 LBP to the one USD, to around 19,000 Lira to the Dollar and rising. Effectively, many of the personnel of LAF, ISF, and other security agencies have fallen below the poverty line, earning less than 3.1\$ per day, with many of those under threat of falling below the extreme poverty line, receiving only 1.9\$ per day[3]! This dangerous degradation has been mitigated by the Central bank's blanket subsidies, that targeted basic food staples, fuel, medicine, and bread. Unfortunately, in the last months, the Lebanese Central Bank has announced the depletion of most of its foreign currency reserves and has gradually stopped most subsidies[4].



Lira rate compared to the US dollar

It has become a challenge to find much-needed medicine, fuel, or even have a steady supply of electricity. Consequently, sick leaves, rumored desertion, and lack of readiness of the security forces have understandably shot up[5]. Why would soldiers and police officers continue risking their lives to maintaining peace, in an increasingly violent and crime-prone environment, when their current salaries are no longer enough to buy necessities.

For the last few months, the international community, and Lebanon's friends all over the world have been keenly observing the rapidly degrading situation, discussing the most efficient strategies to help maintain order and stability. I believe that they should focus most of their efforts on direct USD cash disbursement to security personal or alternative subsidies.

Elections

Hope! Hope can change the fate of a country, and without it no matter the aid and goodwill, the country will collapse. Indeed, without hope that their country will become better in the short term, countless Lebanese will leave looking for greener pastures, and unfortunately many have already left[8]!

Lebanon and many neighboring countries have been built with the help of outstanding young Lebanese, who enjoyed top-notch education, language skills, and culture. Indeed, if hope is lost all that made Lebanon unique, from its best universities, medical centers, schools, and innovative spirit will be crushed. Without its human capital, Lebanon will be no more! It will take years to get these people back, convincing them that their motherland still deserves a chance. In the late 1980s hundreds of thousands of Lebanese left[9], and it took many years and sustained efforts to get a portion of these expatriates back, convincing them to invest their hard-earned money in the country.



Nowadays a number of these expatriates have lost all their life savings, they feel betrayed and disgusted by those who mislead them and stole their money. Similarly, many locals feel utterly disenchanted by the current political elites, by their corruption, mismanagement, their constant political bickering that has left

the country paralyzed for 10 months[10], and for close to five years in the last ten. If elections are postponed, if the political elites vote to keep themselves in power, for whatever reason, it will be a final betrayal. Many would lose all hope, convincing themselves that this country cannot be redeemed.

If this seems farfetched, or that the political elites are not foolhardy enough to make such a momentous mistake that might have disastrous consequences, following the threats of sanctions, one has only to look at the past year. Indeed, ten months have passed without a government, and despite the threats of sanctions and international pressure, the Lebanese political elites have not formed a government yet[11]!

Conclusion

In the end, it is important to reiterate that it boils down to two imperatives, ensure a functioning army, and holding the parliamentary and presidential elections on time, come hell or high water! It should be a daily mantra for the international community and local alternative parties, elections on time, and help the army!

You see the Lebanese are very resourceful, and every time Lebanon was given half a chance, even a short period of partial stability the Lebanese private sector, its innovators, its youth filled with dreams and grand ideas have surged and growth skyrocketed. Once more we just need that half a chance, we just need stability, order, and to vote for our political representatives! The rest we will take care of!

Therefore, this paper highly recommends and continuation and even an increase of direct food aid and even money disbursement for the security forces! This has become a necessity without which Lebanon will become a failed state as previously discussed. On the other hand, it is important for the international community and the friends and allies of Lebanon to continuously, publicly, and forcefully reiterate the need to hold elections on time with no delays or postponement.

Read next page for references

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