

The danger of sanctions..Hezbollah burdens Lebanon with Iranian oil ships

Beirut – Lebanon is actually entering a new battle no less fierce than its predecessors, with Hezbollah implementing its plans to bring in Iranian oil under the pretext of compensating for the shortage in the local market, which opened the door wide to the growing calls that warn of the danger of this step to Lebanon internally and externally.

The country has been living on the impact of a severe economic crisis for more than two years, amid the obstruction of the political horizon at the level of government formation and the two explosions in Beirut – last year’s explosion and Akkar’s explosion recently – and their repercussions on the internal security situation.

The political actors in Lebanon do not hide their fear of the devastating negative repercussions for the national economy that will result from Hezbollah’s decision to bring in Iranian oil ships, especially in light of the possibility of imposing US sanctions on the country mired in crises.

Observers say that Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah’s betting on Iran to meet the Lebanese fuel needs is aimed at releasing the party’s main supporter in Tehran, as well as placing Lebanon as a hostage in the Iranian sphere of influence in the Middle East.

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The Secretary-General of Hezbollah announced that Lebanon could use Iranian companies to explore and extract oil in Lebanese territorial waters. This statement seemed to some to be “populist” aimed at delivering messages to Israel, but it is no less dangerous in terms of handing Lebanon to Iran on a plate, according to others.

The arrival of the Iranian ships will open a new chapter of the financial crisis that the Lebanese state and the ruling parties – including Hezbollah – failed to remedy in light of the severe fuel shortage, a major part of which is due to cross-border smuggling, monopoly and mismanagement by the ruling political parties.

Attention in Lebanon is turning to the Iranian ship loaded with fuel, which the Secretary-General of Hezbollah has promised more similar ships if it passes safely through the Mediterranean to the country.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh confirmed Monday that his country is ready to ship more fuel to Lebanon if necessary, a day after Nasrallah said that more Iranian oil ships would sail soon.

And Noor News Agency – a semi-official Iranian agency – says that “Iranian fuel shipments to Lebanon were bought by Lebanese Shiite businessmen.” Khatibzadeh said his country was ready to sell more fuel to the Lebanese government.

Prior to his latest announcement, the Secretary-General of Hezbollah repeatedly spoke of US sanctions and the imposition of an external siege on Lebanon, in addition to the internal crisis and the failure to address it, but he refuses to hold the party responsible for the worsening crises at the political and economic levels in the country for more than two years.

Experts say that the arrival of the Iranian ship may take between eight and twelve days if it took the Suez Canal line, and forty days if it forcibly took the Good Hope route in South Africa and from there to the Strait of Gibraltar.

political consequences

Munir Rabie: The Iranian ship may hamper the task of Mikati, who is betting on Washington

Hezbollah’s move is seen as having political repercussions related to the Lebanese situation and the country’s inability to bear the repercussions of falling into the circle of Western sanctions, especially in light of the economic collapse that toppled the national currency and the presence of four out of five people in Lebanon at risk of poverty.

The head of the Future Movement and former Prime Minister Saad Hariri believed that the Iranian support ships would carry with them risks and penalties to the Lebanese, and accused Tehran of working to disrupt the formation of the government with this step.

As for the head of the Lebanese Forces Party, Samir Geagea, he considered that what Hezbollah is doing is illegal internationally and exposes Lebanon to a real disaster, fearing that the party might confiscate the country’s economic decision, after it had previously issued the military and security decisions.

Lina al-Khatib, a Lebanese researcher and director of the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House, Britain’s royal institute of international affairs, wrote that Hezbollah has de facto control of the border with Syria and uses the port of Beirut for illegal trade inside and outside Lebanon without state oversight or interference.

Al-Khatib sees that the party, which was founded in 1982, exercises its hegemony over the Lebanese state through its control of the March 8 alliance, in addition to the flawed and unusual

political structure in Lebanon that allows the pro-Iranian party to wield enormous power inside the country.

Observers expect that Hezbollah's decision – with the support of its allies – will cause Lebanon a new crisis if the United States imposes sanctions or if there are negative repercussions at the level of government files and the political and economic situation.

Penalties and disruption

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah's betting on Iran to meet the Lebanese fuel needs aims to relieve the party's main supporter in Tehran

Lebanese writer and political analyst Mounir Rabie says that the Iranian ship “may not have a direct impact on the process of forming the Lebanese government, but it may affect the level of Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati's mission and his relationship with the Americans and the French.”

Rabie adds that the Iranian ship may make Mikati's mission difficult, who is betting on Washington's support, and these developments may make him reluctant to make concessions in favor of President Michel Aoun, an ally of Hezbollah.

On the twenty-sixth of last July, Mikati was tasked with forming a new government to succeed the caretaker government, which resigned six days after the explosion of the port of Beirut on the fourth of August last year, and since then Lebanon has been unable to form a new government. Hariri remained for about nine months in debates and disagreements with Aoun over the form of the government before he apologized for forming it.

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