

Feltman Confirms No Change in US Middle East Policy

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The US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman has said US Middle East policy will not change under the new American president.

Feltman, a former ambassador to Lebanon, said there was a possibility that "tactics and individuals" would change.

In an interview with the Ash-Sharq al-Awsat daily on Saturday, Feltman said the US administration's "clear and determined policy toward Lebanon" would not change.

On the upcoming parliamentary elections in Lebanon, the former ambassador said he did not expect a sweeping win for either the March 14 or March 8 alliances. The best solution in Lebanon was a government of national unity, he added.

"Whoever wins the election will do so by a very narrow margin, which pushes me to think that none of the parties will be able to impose their view on others. There are also many existing balances in the Lebanese system, as I understand, and I do not think that any party will have an overwhelming victory," Feltman told the daily.

Feltman pointed out that his country saw "encouraging signs" in dialogue among national institutions on the national defense strategy in Lebanon.

"No one expects the complete elimination of Hezbollah's weapons in the near future, but we are encouraged by the internal dialogue among Lebanese leaders."

"There is no solution to this soon, but what concerns us is that the Lebanese realise that the weapons of Hezbollah will subject them to blows rather than protect them," he concluded.