

## Saudi Donation cancellation: Strategic setback for Lebanon

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The cancellation of the Saudi financial donation to the Lebanese Army is -whatever are the reasons- a strategic setback for Lebanon, at a time a large Arab coalition is rising and widening. In our assessment and as our US and Saudi sources have reported, the cancellation was caused by several factors. One was the general control by Hezbollah of the national security apparatus in the country. Two was the alignment of the Government diplomacy with Tehran against Riyadh and the Gulf. Three, which was according to our sources, the triggering point for the decision, was the last Presidential election fiasco as March 14 leaders selected politicians from the pro-Hezbollah March 8 axis, for the Presidency of Lebanon. This last double move, regardless of how Lebanese politicians argue about it, cannot be accepted by the Arab coalition. A source in Washington told me "how can Arab Gulf send billions to a country which could be ruled by a pro-Iranian President. It is not going to happen."

According to our sources, the matter is not internal to the Saudi Government. Just the opposite, there is a solid consensus behind it in the Kingdom. The move is not directed at the Lebanese Army but it is a message addressed to politicians. An ally to Tehran in Baabda will not get billions from Riyadh. Pretty simple.

But the good news is that this and other donations would be redirected to the Lebanese Army again if a new move would reshuffle the current politics and an emerging leadership would stir the country in a different direction. It is hard to see it but there the window is there...