



SECURITY  
COUNCIL

# Security Council

TOPIC B:

## **Lebanon's Unstable Political State**

**Undersecretary:**

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# INTRODUCTION

On August 4, 2020, a large warehouse suddenly exploded in Beirut, Lebanon; leveling one of its most important ports, killing about 200 people and injuring 5,000 others. While some thought that the event was accidental, reports soon surged that the building had been housing more than 2,700 metric tons of ammonium nitrate - a highly volatile substance - for almost 7 years because the government hadn't decided who was responsible for handling it accordingly. The catastrophic event caused many government officials to step down, but the Lebanese people didn't think it was enough to do so. Many recent nation-wide disasters have been negatively impacting the country, and it's mainly due to a provisional government structure that failed to evolve after the Civil War, one consumed in corruption and a lack of accountability that has left Lebanon in an alarming political, social, economic, and almost every other conceivable state.

## BACKGROUND RESEARCH

One of the most pivotal keys to understand the political structure of the country is the multiple religious communities that reside within it. The nation counts with eighteen total subgroups, including Armenian Catholic and Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Orthodox, and the Druze; however, the most influential are the Maronite Catholics and the Sunni and Shia Muslims. A BBC Article from 2020 argues that "it is this religious diversity that makes the country an easy target for interference by external powers, as seen with Iran's backing of the Shia Hezbollah movement, widely seen as the most powerful military and political group in Lebanon", especially considering the complicated history between them.

These three religions shared power in Lebanon during some parts of the 20th Century, but they fell apart into a Civil War in 1975, with the Muslims on one side and the Maronites on the other. The devastating conflict lasted for 15 years, and it eventually incited the rest of sects to form militias. A year after it began, Syrian forces invaded and Israel followed in 1983, each supporting a different side and worsening the dispute, which finally ended in 1989 as its leaders came together to form the Taif Agreement. The new treaty stated that the government would temporarily be divided into the three powers once again by providing different sections to each of them; a Maronite would be President, a Sunni would be Prime Minister and a Shia would be the Parliament Speaker.

Two main problems arose from this situation: most of the militias fighting in the war disbanded and took places in the new government seats (meaning that tensions were heightened even more as the opposing groups now had to work together) and the original plan to transition into a nonsectarian government didn't ever happen. "Instead, the politicians separated their portions of government and turned them into fiefdoms, using them to enrich themselves and their sect" (Ellis; Elidrissi, 2020). This kept on happening in the country over the course of the years, especially because the same politicians have stayed in office for decades, and people have limited acting options when

protesting because “attempts to unseat a particular leader are quickly seen as attacks on the sect itself, leading to a rallying effect around said leader regardless of their performance” (Itani, 2020).

Additionally, Lebanon doesn't produce much as a country, and it relies heavily on imports from foreign nations. As corruption increased within the politicians charged with providing basic services for their people, the lack of responsibility began having an incredibly negative effect on its population, whether it was an inability to contain large wildfires from spreading due to firefighters being underfunded, a public water fee for largely undrinkable water, electricity blackouts or a disastrous trash crisis in 2015 because the government wasn't picking up waste regularly, the number of emergency situations that Lebanon has faced in the last decade are extremely preoccupying, and slowly began deteriorating people's conditions in general. The Beirut explosion was yet another example of the disconcerting mismanagement from the Lebanese government, especially considering the economic condition of the nation.

Most banks (which also happened to be one of the country's most substantial income sources, also controlled partly by the government) got involved in a so called “Ponzi Scheme”, which consisted of offering high interest rates for both international investors and localw, even if being aware that they wouldn't be able to hold those high interests for long. As the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011, many investors were quick to pull their money out of the banks, fearing the proximity of the conflict. By 2015, the government already owned 70 billion dollars, an amount larger than its entire Gross Domestic Product. The Prime Minister was then mysteriously taken hostage for 10 days in Saudi Arabia, so international faith in Lebanon plummeted - and so did the money from the investors. To try and handle the situation, “the government proposed new taxes on tobacco, petrol, and voice calls via messaging services such as WhatsApp to drum up more revenue” (BBC, 2020), but people couldn't retire their own money from the banks because they were falling down, so they took to the streets to protest; and they kept protesting until the Coronavirus pandemic began in the country.

The imposed lockdown made many others lose their jobs, and as a “new normality” began to be established around May, people left their homes to find that the prices for food, medicine, and basic needs had hiked up considerably - without money or trust from other countries, Lebanon struggled to import the goods it usually did, especially with one of its major ports leveled by the explosion in Beirut. Many government cabinets have stepped down, but the situation keeps worsening and no one seems to be able to manage it. Lebanese people argue that no real change will come until the sectarian government is completely disbanded and built again.

## UNITED NATIONS INTERVENTION

While many countries in the international community have taken notice of the issue and offered their support - particularly the International Monetary Fund, which has offered a bailout for Lebanon's economic crisis - they've done it under the condition that the sectarian government is disbanded and a new system is created, but politicians have been debating on how to do so for more than two years without an end in sight. China, the United States, Israel, France, and various other countries have proposed aid in alternative plans for the country to rebuild; having said that, they all have different reasons to do so, each with something to gain from influencing Lebanon.

This is added to Iran and Syria's indirect involvement in the prevalent conflict between religious sects; for example, "the terrorist organization Hezbollah, created in 1982, is the agent of Iran's interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. It integrated into the political system of the country, took the majority of the seats in parliament reserved for Shiites. There are 30,000 militants under the arms of Hezbollah, and prominent representatives of the Shiite community usually head responsible departments, including the ministries of finance and transport. Despite belonging to Sunni Islam, ex-Prime Minister Hassan Diab had a reputation as a favor to Hezbollah and Iran" (Kuhaleyshvili, 2020). These and more factors have complicated any intervention or support from the United Nations and the international community.



## POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Many have suggested that a new government would have to be created by technocrats, which the Collins English Dictionary defines as "a scientist, engineer, or other expert who is one of a group of similar people who have political power as well as technical knowledge".
- The proposed loan from the International Monetary Fund has been delayed since 2018, due to the Lebanese government not creating a new system.
- The US dollar used to be an important currency in the country, but it has completely disappeared from both the banks and the black market - the Lebanese pound lost more than 80% of its value.
- The country was facing a 25% unemployment rate (with about a third of the entire population residing below the poverty line) even before the COVID-19 Pandemic arose.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

- A. What is my country's position?
- B. What are my country's policies?
- C. What can my country do to solve this issue?
- D. Which countries can my delegation work with?
- E. What are three possible solutions?
- F. What has been done to solve the problem?

## USEFUL LINKS

-“How the Beirut explosion was a government failure” - Vox

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFpfYTYupKA>

-“Lebanon in crisis | DW Documentary”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKagJvf9tsg>

-“Crisis upon crisis: blast rocks a Lebanon already on its knees”

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/05/crisis-upon-crisis-blast-rocks-a-lebanon-already-on-its-knees>

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