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THE FERTILE CRESCENT**

**FACILITATING THE RESTORATION OF
GOVERNMENTAL CONTROL IN LEBANON**

ZEYNEP NUR SELÇUK





Basic Overview of the Issue

The problem of restoring effective governmental control in Lebanon is very complex, based on historical, political, economic, and social factors that have created and have caused instability into the country. The unique sectarian-based governance system at the core of the issue was established through the Taif Agreement in 1989 to balance power among its diverse religious communities.

The solution found by this formula brought years of civil war to an end but, in itself, integrated a political system of corruption. There had been continuous political stalemates that left the country's inability to focus or lead into critical, new implementations of issues. It all started in 2019, coupled with arguably the worst financial crisis of modern times. It witnessed a nosedive in its currency, the Lebanese pound. Neither was the banking sector working, except for their total failure. Unimaginable high inflation rates and skyrocketing unemployment has put people at the mercy of extreme poverty to survive. People also hardly get basic services like electricity, healthcare, and education. Therefore, such situations are also causing countrywide protests and furthering public appreciation. The tragic explosion at Beirut Port in 2020 underlined how rotten Lebanon's governance failures were.

Added to this is the strong influence of very powerful non-state actors: Hezbollah, a political military force operating from behind the scenes alongside the state. In so doing, it has damaged the central authority, turning Lebanon into a zone of complicated geopolitical rivalries. For over three years now, the country still hosts more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees, considerably stretching its already strained resources, provoking social tension.

This restoration of governmental control in Lebanon has to navigate multilayered strategies-one of which is addressing root causes that lead to such crises. To begin with, it needs to head toward more political accountability, transparency, and weakening of sectarianism in governance, while economically having an integrated program for the financial sector's stabilization in place, promoting international investment, and the rehabilitation of basic infrastructures. In security terms, this integration of militia into state



structures or disbandment must provide the government with the capacity to reassert its force while getting rid of external interference.

Explanation of Important Terms

Sectarianism

A system where political power is divided among religious or ethnic groups, often causing division and inefficiency. In Lebanon, it fuels political gridlock. (Brookings Institution, 2019)

Sovereignty

The government's ability to control its territory and decisions without outside interference. Lebanon struggles with sovereignty due to external powers and groups like Hezbollah. (Clingendael Institute, 2020)

Economic Reform

Changes aimed at fixing the economy, such as fighting corruption, stabilizing the currency, and restructuring banks. Essential for Lebanon's recovery. (World Bank, 2023)

Humanitarian Crisis

A severe shortage of basic needs in terms of food, healthcare, and shelter Lebanon is experiencing the consequences of it through poverty, failing services, and hosting Syrian refugees. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022)

International Control

International supervision to account for transparency and proper aid utilization. Principal actors include: IMF and France with regard to international reform efforts taken up by Lebanon. (Overseas Development Institute, 2023)



Non-State Actors

Groups or organizations that are not controlled by the government, such as Hezbollah, which is a powerful group in Lebanon. (International Crisis Group, 2021)

Hyperinflation

The primary concern in Lebanon is the extreme and very rapid price hike that made the country lose such a huge value of its currency. (World Bank, 2023)

Public Sector Reform

Changes targeted at increasing the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of government institutions and services. (World Bank, 2023)

Detailed Background of the Issue

History of Lebanese Politics

The political history of Lebanon is a reflection of the country's governance challenges faced with its intricate religious and cultural diversity. Positioned at the intersection of various Middle Eastern civilizations, Lebanon has a rich heritage influenced by the Phoenicians, Romans, Ottomans, and the French. However, this cultural richness has come with a cost, as Lebanon finds itself at the center of external interventions and conflicts. After the first world war and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Lebanon emerged as a modern state. The areas under Lebanon came under French control through the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, which resulted in the establishment of the French Mandate of Lebanon in 1920. During this period, France aimed to establish a state to ensure the region's demographic variety, stressing specifically on Maronite Christians. It was during this period that the confessional political system was introduced in Lebanon. With the implementation of the 1926 constitution, the system of power was altered in which every community's religious faction accounted for, enabling maronite Christians, Sunnis, Shia Muslims, druze, and other sects to claim political authority. However, this system also institutionalized sectarian divisions, creating a delicate balance that would prove increasingly fragile over time.

The National Pact of 1943

The National Pact of 1943, between Christian and Muslim leaders which was



not officially documented, deepened the sectarian foundation of Lebanese politics. The agreement specified that the country would have a president who is a Maronite Christian, prime minister who is a Sunni, and the Shia Muslim speaker of the parliament. The pact also stressed on Lebanon's Arab identity while ensuring the country was not subjected to Western or Arab dominance. Even though the National Pact reduced conflicts for a while, it also strengthened the sectarian divisions and proved to be ineffective in the changing demographics and politics of the region.

Golden Age of Lebanon

Lebanon experienced a time period of considerable wealth and prosperity around the time period of the mid-1940s and towards the start of the 1970s. The era of Lebanese prosperity is often referred to as a “Golden Age” which underscores the increase in the quality of lifestyle. The era was characterized with economic growth, cultural thriving and humanitarian amelioration that came along with political stabilization. Although at the time, compared to Western nations, Lebanon could not be classified as a pioneer country in the areas of science, development and human rights. However, relative to the other nations that were struggling because of the insurgency in the Middle East, the nation of Lebanon was able to provide a comfortable quotidian life to its citizens. During this time, Lebanon's banking sector expanded and established itself as a regional capital hub due to the country's open economic policies. The weakness of laws governing the banking sector, combined with the growing political violence in surrounding nations, enhanced foreign investments into Lebanon. The country also had a strong Lebanese lira and a diversified economy with the rise of agriculture, industrial, and service sectors. At this time, Lebanon geographically positioned itself as a hub for Arab cultural and artistic activities. The country was able to draw the attention of Arab musicians, classic poets, and writers, enabling it to savor a cultural rebirth. Lebanese international symbolization of vibrant culture was achieved through Fairuz and the Rahbani Brothers. Despite all the progress, at the root of it there was a severity of socio-political issues. The combination of Economic divides between the city and countryside, along with changes in demographics



and the static nature of the political power structure, began future clashes. This was very problematic for the delicate sectarian balance of Lebanon, which was already stressed due to the increase of Palestinian refugees after the establishment of Israel in 1948 and continuous regional conflicts.

Economic Devastation

The economic crisis can be associated with a plethora of causes throughout the recent history of Lebanon. Although national and international issues such as the 2020 Beirut Explosion and the COVID-19 pandemic affected the severity of the situation, the crisis essentially derives from the devastating effects of the governmental corruption that the country of Lebanon has been suffering for years. The corruption has occurred as a result of the Lebanese Civil War that lasted around 15 years. As the GDP per capita dropped by 36.5% between the years of 2019 and 2020, the World Bank has changed the status of the country from upper-middle income to lower-middle income in July 2022 (World Bank, 2024). The World Bank states that such an alteration in status is predominantly associated with conflicts or wars. The situation is an outcome of the infrastructural devastation which caused the government to endeavor to revive the damage. In order to achieve that, the government accumulated a distinct amount of debt and these actions had a major impact on the economy and the traces of these actions are still apparent in the contemporary financial environment of Lebanon.



Figure 1: A Lebanese woman protesting because of the economic burden

Current Major Issue

The government in Lebanon does not have any total control over the territory and its institutions, thereby limiting its political activities, allowing economic collapse to continue, and causing security concerns. This has opened the gates to corruption and mismanagement in governance and influences by foreign elements that diminish the



sovereignty of the country. The economic crisis, described by the World Bank as one of the worst in 150 years, has left the Lebanese pound in freefall, while unemployment and inflation increased. Public services like electricity, healthcare, and education are on the brink of collapse, and trust in state institutions is at an all-time low. This is compounded by powerful non-state actors, such as Hezbollah, operating out of the governments' control. The lack of necessary reforms has put international assistance into freeze mode, hence the country stands lonely and its citizens more desperate with each passing day. Since 2019, Lebanon has plunged into one of the worst economies in modern history. The currency has lost over 90 percent of its purchasing power, placing millions into misery as hyperinflation erases purchasing power. Once considered at least a regional financial hub, Lebanon's banking sector has largely frozen citizen deposits, destroying public trust. More than 80% of the population of this country is presently living below the poverty limit, and the rate of unemployment is growing while basic commodities become unaffordable. Public services have collapsed, there is electricity for only a few hours a day, healthcare systems are at the breaking point, and schools barely function. But while structural reforms are long overdue, the government has not taken any serious steps to affect them, and Lebanon has been left in isolation from crucial financial support. This inactiveness of the government has increased public frustration against the government, fueling protests against corruption, mismanagement, and the influence of external powers are evident as each pursues their interests in the region. Iran is a big supporter of Hezbollah, building its military and political influence into what aimed to be like a parallel power that tries to undercut the Lebanese government. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have pulled back on financial support, frustrated by Hezbollah's strong position and the ways in which Lebanon has aligned itself with Iran, further weakening the economy. France, the colonial power of yesteryear, is at the forefront of diplomacy aimed at reform but opposed by the entrenched elites. The United States has offered military assistance to Lebanon against Hezbollah and has enforced sanctions that limited the economic development. The conflict in Syria has affected Lebanon through refugee waves and political entanglements, while for Israel, the presence of Hezbollah is a direct threat to its border, as it often remains on the brink of tensions.

Impact of the Lebanese Civil War

The Lebanese Civil War, which initiated in 1975 and lasted until 1990, has



caused the Lebanese economy to collapse due to governmental debts for the reconstruction of the affected areas. Perpetrators that took advantage of the post-war vulnerable condition of the Lebanese state. In 1990 when the government led by Rafic Hariri started implementing reforms regarding the reconstruction of the country, the amount of debt that the government had increased.

2020 Beirut Explosion

The explosion in the capital city of Lebanon in August 2020 caused over 200 deaths and numerous injuries. (Reuters, 2020) The explosion also tremendously impacted the already corrupt economic situation of Lebanon, causing it to lose resources in order to heal itself from the infrastructural burden and commercial losses.

Governmental Issues Leading to Loss of Control

The sectarian and religious diversity that Lebanon embodies has contributed to the governmental insurgency. In national politics, sectarian differences can play a vital role in the political stability in a country. Treaties held in the confessional political system have, with irony, become some of the most profound weaknesses for Lebanon,



Figure 2: Extent of the explosion

while preventing any individual religious sect from gaining dominance. This system is meant to preserve representation but at the same time only encourages sectarian identities and patronage politics. Political representatives tend to serve their sectarian voters instead of trying to unite the nation, which causes endless stalemates. Making decisions is habitually stalled or blocked, because agreement on different factions is hard to find. It has encouraged rampant corruption, with many claiming resources and opportunities being given out based on sectarian affiliation, rather than merit.



Confidence in Lebanon's institutions have been depleted due to decades of mismanagement and corruption. Some politicians have been charged for embezzling public funds, cronyism, and failure to provide public services. There is no proper supply of basic infrastructure such as electricity, water, and proper waste management. In 2019, public frustration escalated to the point mass protests erupted against the elite ruling class. This exposed the political class's inability to manage the multiple crises that have devastated the country. The 2019 economic collapse further proved that the government is not able to properly manage the nation.

The Lebanese government's grip over the country has been severely weakened by non-state actors, more specifically Hezbollah. Hezbollah is a powerful political and military entity that functions parallel to the state, with separate arms as well as administrative institutions. Although Hezbollah enjoys considerable support among Lebanese Shia, its policies often derive more from the Iranian perspective than national needs. The combination of these dualities makes the Lebanese sovereignty more complex and produces tense situations on both the internal and external fronts. The same countries, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and France, together with international institutions, aggravate the Lebanese politics because their interference has various degrees of impact, which deepens the cleavages of the Lebanese society. Because of this, there is no single vision to work towards. Political parties are too busy chasing their foreign interests so there is no hope of these factions coming together and making Lebanon a stable country. The Lebanese judiciary, similar to other state institutions, is not independent and is always under some degree of political pressure. This has made it impossible to hold public servants accountable for corrupt practices, negligence and other misconduct. The 2020 Beirut explosion demonstrated this weakness, where even the international community could not understand how the political system of Lebanon is so fragile that with so much evidence, the investigations into this manmade disaster are still actively being obstructed by political forces. The lack of accountability perpetuates a culture of impunity and undermines public confidence in the state.

International Implications of the Issue

Lebanon has one of the largest refugees to local populations ratios, hosting 1.5



million Syrian refugees and hundreds of thousands of them coming from Palestine (UNHCR, 2024). Because of the deep political and economic issues within the country, supporting these groups proves difficult for the government. Yet, such lack of assistance could lead to food deprivation and inadequate health facilities which could spread over to neighbouring countries. There can be no doubt they will require international assistance. Lebanon's eased financial role in the Middle East has been coupled with the collapse of the banking system. While losing trust in such institutions, the consequences for the international community were profound, particularly for those who invested heavily within the Lebanese banks. There is also the chance that Lebanon could slip further towards a failed state direction where arms proliferation, human smuggling, and various types of international crime could escalate. With the unconditional aid given to them by the US and France, there is no pretending that Lebanon's issues aren't being closely monitored. After all, the legislation of these countries is forcing them to stay involved. The assets are being put on the table by the United States of America and France for a reason: they seek to prove the functions and serve the diplomatic arguments of aid dependency and more state regulation abroad.

Major Parties Involved

Lebanon

At the center of the issue is Lebanon, where Civil war, economic strife, and rampant dysfunction of the government are common. Despite these troubles, the Lebanese government has been seeking control and tackling these issues. The severity of the Lebanese crisis has gone undetected for so long because actors have posed as reasonable, set limits on division of power, and dispersed among the country, such as the Shiite Islamist group, Hezbollah. Civil unrest in Lebanon is simultaneously a Civil war and a tool for powerful non-state actors to destabilize regions they dominate. Lebanon is both a victim and a catalyst for the issues surrounding every fragile state.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Lebanon has been kept in a constant state of war. All of these reasons enhance Iran's hold on Lebanon and make Tehran move confidently. It is evident that Iranian expansionism in itself is contradictory to global and regional peace, but amping tension over Hezbollah



issues pours fuel to so many flames. This involvement adds yet another layer to the wall preventing Lebanon from being stable as it increases factional tensions and connects Lebanon's issues with the global political arena.

Iraq

In Iraq, a significant concern is the sectarian and political violence that stems from a shared past in the country. As is the case with Lebanon, Iraq has been the subject of foreign meddling and had to endure the direct effects of Iranian policies. While Iraq does not have a specific agenda towards Lebanon, the two countries have common sectarian identities as well as regional interests, thus making Iraq an important actor in any deliberation concerning governance and stability in the region. Iraq is also an important counterpart of the politics of the Middle East. Dealing with various terrorist organizations, the country is closely related to the insurgency in Lebanon.

State of Israel

Israel's geographic location relative to Lebanon, along with its history of conflict with Hezbollah, means that it is an important factor in the issue of Lebanon. The recurrent military conflicts and border skirmishes between Israel and Hezbollah berths many challenges for Lebanon. Israel is aware of the security dangers posed by having such an organization as Hezbollah with its many rockets and opposition to Israel, as well as the Iranian connection. Thus, Israel is often found to be on the defensive side which, however, does not make the region less volatile. Concern for Israeli security adds an obstacle in any resolving of the agenda.

Jordan

Jordan's place in the matter is influenced by the country's geography and politics. As a neighboring country of Lebanon, and since it accommodates a lot of refugees, Jordan has an interest in maintaining a degree of regional stability. Jordan acts within the policy umbrella so that the country also plays the role of an intermediary in conflicts in the region, pushing for peace and stability.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and a terrorist group. The paramilitary wing of the organization is called the Jihad Council, which aims to fight other



nations and religious beliefs in the name of spreading Islam. In 2026, it was assessed that the organization had a similar size of military power to a medium-sized army. It is one of the organizations that contributed to the loss of governmental control in Lebanon because of its rebel attacks and actions throughout the Middle East.

Hamas

Hamas is a Sunni Islamist and Palestinian armed organization. It has been governing Gaza since 2007. The presence gained prominence following the announcement of the formation of the Al-Aqsa Flood Vanguard unit by Hamas in Beirut in 2023. According to Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) Leader Gebran Bassil, Hamas's establishment in Lebanon raised concerns about Lebanon's sovereignty and stability.

Chronology of Important Events

Date	Description of Event
October 22, 1989	The Taif Agreement
September 2, 2004	UN Security Council Resolution 1559 (S/RES/1559) is adopted.
February 14, 2005	Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is assassinated.
April 26, 2005	Syrian forces complete their withdrawal from Lebanon.



July 12 – August 14, 2006	The 2006 Lebanon War
May 21, 2008	The Doha Agreement
August 4, 2020	Beirut Port Explosion
March 2021	World Bank reports that Lebanon's economic crisis ranks among the worst globally since the 19th century.

Relevant International Documents

- UN Security Council Resolution 1559, September 2nd, 2004 (S/RES/1559)
Adopted by the Security Council at its 5057th meeting, 2 September 2004
[https://undocs.org/S/RES/1559\(2004\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1559(2004))
- UN Security Council Resolution 1701, August 11th, 2006 (S/RES/1701)
Adopted by the Security Council at its 5500th meeting, 11 August 2006
[https://undocs.org/S/RES/1701\(2006\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1701(2006))
- UN Security Council Resolution 2282, April 27th, 2016 (S/RES/2282)
Adopted by the Security Council at its 7671st meeting, 27 April 2016
[https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282(2016))
- UN Security Council Resolution 2373, September 15th, 2017 (S/RES/2373)
Adopted by the Security Council at its 8047th meeting, 15 September 2017
[https://undocs.org/S/RES/2373\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2373(2017))
- UN Security Council Resolution 2489, September 12th, 2019 (S/RES/2489)
Adopted by the Security Council at its 8679th meeting, 12 September 2019
[https://undocs.org/S/RES/2489\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2489(2019))



- UN Security Council Resolution 2254, December 18th, 2015 (S/RES/2254)
Adopted by the Security Council at its 7594th meeting, 18 December 2015
[https://undocs.org/S/RES/2254\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2254(2015))
- The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
Multidimensional poverty in Lebanon (2019-2021)
https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/news/docs/21-00634- multidimensional_poverty_in_lebanon_policy_brief_en.pdf
- UNDP Lebanon Strategic Framework 2023-2025
https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/UNSDCF_Lebanon_2023-2025.pdf
- UNDP Programme on Governance and Peacebuilding in Lebanon, 2020
<https://www.undp.org/lebanon/projects/peacebuilding-lebanon-project-pb>

Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

International donors and organizations regarding this problem, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have provided Lebanon with enough financial support in condition and under the supervision of its implementation, which include anti-corruption measures, fiscal transparency, and restructuring of the banking sector. After the 2020 Beirut Port explosion, France took the lead in diplomacy; Emmanuel Macron, the president, called for the technical government and an immediate reform agenda. Now, despite initial momentum, challenges by powerful political interests had been entrenched. Other regional players, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, have provided financial support from time to time but have pulled back in recent years, frustrated by Lebanon's failure to contain Hezbollah's ascendancy and to adopt serious reforms.

Solution Alternatives

No doubt, in solving Lebanon's crises, a detailed response covering each single spot would be necessary. Another option will be the launching of an internationally monitored reform package running in parallel with the financial package and working with such organizations as the IMF, hence the complete transparency, accountability, along with the source for the financing needed to stabilize the economy and rebuilding crucial infrastructures.

This reform will eventually require the full commitment of Lebanon's political pieces to set



aside personal interests for the greater national good, isolated from systematic corruption. The international oversight would be ensuring that funds are directed toward rebuilding critical sectors, such as but not limited to energy, healthcare, and education, while also addressing corruption and inefficiency within public institutions.

Useful Links

- BBC News Middle East – Lebanon
https://www.bbc.com/news/world/middle_east
- Reuters – Lebanon News
<https://www.reuters.com/>
- Al Jazeera – Lebanon
<https://www.aljazeera.com/where/lebanon/>
- The CIA World Factbook – Lebanon
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/lebanon/>
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – Lebanon
<https://www.undp.org/lebanon>
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – Lebanon
<https://www.unocha.org/lebanon>
- Human Rights Watch – Lebanon
<https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/lebanon>
- International Crisis Group – Lebanon
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon>
- The Lebanese Armed Forces Official Website
<https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en>

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