



**MUNDP 2020**  
COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPMENT

# RESEARCH REPORT

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC)

TAKING MEASURES TO RESOLVE POLITICAL UNREST IN  
LEBANON

ZEYNEP YILMAZ





## Basic Overview of the Issue

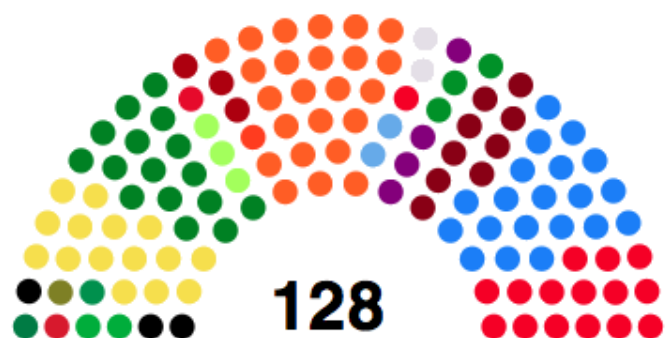
Since mid-October 2019, there has been growing political unrest in Lebanon. There are ongoing civil protests against the Lebanese government since October 17th, and this reaction is mainly attributed to the current economic crisis in Lebanon and the citizens' disapproval of the sectarian rule. These reactions are elevated due to the fact that the Lebanese government even fails to supply the citizens' basic sanitation needs or electricity. Even though the Lebanese citizens were dealing with similar problems for a very long time, the inciting incident for these protests was the planned taxation of many resources, including WhatsApp services, which even led to the protests being called the "WhatsApp protests".

Twelve days after the beginning of the protests, on the 29th of October, Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his government resigned amid protests. However, the protests are still proceeding since the Lebanese citizens are asking the whole political body of Lebanon to resign and are demanding new political systems to be set in their country, as many are concerned about the reliability and strength of sectarianism. Additionally, there are civil supporters of the government's leading parties (such as Hezbollah and Amal Movement), and these supporters are protesting against the ongoing protests, as well as regularly attacking the protesters at different cities in Lebanon.

## Explanation of Important Terms

### Sectarianism

Sectarianism is defined as the "excessive attachment to a particular sect or party, especially in religion" by the Oxford dictionary; however, the term has deeper reflections upon the political and legal systems of Lebanon since, for instance, the people are only allowed to vote for representatives within their



own sects, the parliament is divided into eighteen allocated sects, the president of Lebanon must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister must be a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Parliament must be a Shia Muslim. These allocated positions are widely criticized since



many people believe that they should be electing the candidates according to their competencies, not their sects.

### *Sect*

A sect is defined as “a group of people with somewhat different religious beliefs from those of a larger group to which they belong” by the Oxford dictionary. There are eighteen sects in Lebanon: Alawite, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Chaldean, *Seat distribution among religious sects in the Lebanese parliament.* Coptic, Druze, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Ismaili, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, Sunni, Shia, Syriac Catholic, and Syriac Orthodox. These sects are not only religious groups, but they fundamentally define the political system of Lebanon due to the aforementioned reasons. (See the section “Sectarianism”)

### *Political Groups in the Lebanese Parliament*

Even though specific sects select the representatives in the parliament, and specific numbers of representatives are allocated to each sect in the parliament, there are different political groups in the Lebanese parliament, which we can easily define as political parties. Further, the groups are mainly gathered around two alliances, these two alliances being the March 8 and March 14 alliances (pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian respectively), even though there are a few unaffiliated groups.

### *Hezbollah*

Hezbollah (or Party of God in Arabic) is a political and militant group that consists of Shia Muslims, and it is one of the groups that constitute the political alliance that governs Lebanon. It was established as a militia during the Lebanese Civil War but then has turned into a political group that has thirteen seats in the Lebanese parliament.

### *Amal Movement*

The Amal Movement (or the Hope Movement in Arabic) is again a political group that consists of Shia Muslims, and it is viewed as the largest representative organ of Shia Muslims in the parliament since it has sixteen seats. The party is in alliance with Hezbollah, and they are



currently known to oppose the ongoing civil protests in Lebanon, supporting the government and opposing the resignation of the Prime Minister.

### *Meritocracy*

Meritocracy is a system in which the people are evaluated on the basis of their achievements, and the main reason why this contradicts with sectarianism is that sectarianism requires specific numbers of people from each sect to be elected regardless of the achievements of people from different sects.

## **Detailed Background of the Issue**

The ongoing protests since mid-October have been attributed to many different things such as the outcry against the sectarian rule, the economic crisis, or the seek of meritocracy. Such problems are not new to the Lebanese society since sectarianism has been a part of the country since 1989 when the Taif Agreement was signed. Similar protests were observed throughout the recent history of Lebanon, a very recent example being the 2015-16 protests against the government. There are apparently rooted political problems in the system itself, which then leads to political unrest in the whole country. Therefore, one must have a thorough understanding of the historical background of the current problems to be able to analyze them.

### **Historical Background of the Ongoing Protests**

The current sectarian rule has been established as a result of the Taif Agreement in 1989, which was an agreement signed to conclude the Lebanese Civil War and ease the tension between parties, aiming to lead to a more “balanced” Lebanese government.

#### ***Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)***

Lebanon has always been a multisectarian country; Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, and Christians were the major sects in the country, and Maronite Christians mostly controlled the political actions of the government (which was mostly based on Western values). However, the Muslims in the country were opposed to the idea of a west-aligned government; therefore, many pan-Arabist (in support the unification of the Arab states) and leftist groups were formed to oppose the Christian-dominated government. During this time, there was emergent tension between Palestinian refugees in the country and the Lebanese government. The pan-Arabist and leftist



groups aligned with the Palestinian refugees and their militias; whereas the Maronite Christians were aligned with the Western government. This was considered to be a mere reflection of the Cold War.

During this 15-year-long civil war, there were many changes in the alliances and many foreign countries such as Israel and Syria which were involved in the civil war. There were also third parties such as the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to ease the tension between the parties of the civil war, which is still present in the Israeli border of Lebanon to prevent any violent acts between two countries, but the forces are not currently working to prevent tension between citizens and government officers in the current protests.

### *The Taif Agreement*

The Taif Agreement was signed in order to end the Lebanese Civil War and ease the tension between different sects in Lebanon. Even though the agreement also helped to demilitarize the zone and ensured that foreign countries would withdraw from Lebanon, this agreement is considered to be harmful in the long run.

Sectarianism has been a problem even before this agreement was signed and ratified; however, while the government was trying to ease the tension between the sects, it has enacted sectarianism as an official way of governing Lebanon. After this point, the seats in the parliament were divided according to sects, and certain positions in the government were allocated to specific sects, which basically oppose the idea of meritocracy and can be considered as a problem by the modern Lebanese society and international communities.



## Ongoing Protests



*Lebanese protesters on the streets*

The protests have started on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019; right after the government announced that they will be taxing calls from online platforms such as WhatsApp. This was the last straw for the Lebanese people as the protests started immediately; however, it is perfectly legitimate to say that the protests express deeper criticisms than mere protests against taxations.

There are two main criticisms of the protests: one is the economic crisis Lebanon is in right now, and the other and the “main” one is the sectarian rule in the country. Due to the aforementioned reasons, Lebanese citizens are protesting in different parts of Lebanon, and as a result of these protests, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October, Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his government have resigned. Even though the protesters are happy with the resignation, many of them are still asking for deeper changes in the political body, and many political scientists are therefore calling these protests the “successor” of the Arab Spring, a movement of protests in Arab states against their respective governments in the early 2010s.

### ***Oppositions to the Ongoing Protests***

Even though many Lebanese citizens are protesting on the streets, some of the political groups that constitute the government are opposed to the protests. Hezbollah and Amal Movement have made statements that acknowledge the problems with the current taxations; however, they have openly stated that they were opposing the resignation of the Prime Minister, as well as the ongoing protests. Lebanese citizens who support these political groups





are said to be attacking the protesters physically in different cities of Lebanon, which leads to elevated polarization between not only the political groups but also the Lebanese citizens who are from different sects and who support different political groups. The government officials have also been trying to ease the tension in the streets; therefore, police officers are actively taking part in the streets; many are concerned that the police officers are using excessive methods to react to these protests.

## Major Parties Involved

### *Lebanese Government*

The most remarkable action taken by the Lebanese government was the resignation of the Prime Minister, and other than that, it would be legitimate to say that the government has been quite unresponsive to many criticisms. However, the current Lebanese government consists of different political groups as suggested by the sectarian rule; nonetheless, some of the parties are more dominant since the beginning of the protests: Hezbollah and Amal Movement. The report will be elaborating on the aforementioned political groups in the upcoming sub-sections.

### *Lebanese Protesters*

The Lebanese protesters are not associated with a single sect or a political group, but they are rather a diverse group of citizens who protest against the government due to the reasons mentioned in several different parts of this report.

### *Hezbollah and Amal Movement*

Hezbollah and Amal Movement are both political groups that follow Shia Islam, and have been particularly active since the beginning of the protests. These political groups have been explicitly opposing the protests as mentioned in previous sections. (See the section “Oppositions to the Ongoing Protests”)



## *Syria*

Syria has occupied Lebanon before and during the Lebanese Civil War, and even though the relationships were eased by a Brotherhood Agreement in 1991, a tension was created by the assassination of a former Prime Minister of Lebanon. Rafic Hariri used to speak against the Syrian control over Lebanon; therefore, Syria was held accountable for the assassination, then leading to different alliances in the Lebanese parliament. (See the section “Political Groups in the Lebanese Parliament”)

## *Iran*

Hezbollah is viewed as Iran’s proxy in Lebanon since it supports Hezbollah and follows Shia Islam as well. The protests against the government, therefore, show that Iran has been losing its effect on Lebanon and the Middle East as a whole.

## *Israel*

Contrary to Iran, Israel is an adversary of Hezbollah, and Hezbollah losing its effect in Lebanon benefits Israel since they are threatened by the military power of Hezbollah for many years.

## *United States of America (USA)*

The United States of America has constantly expressed their willingness to work with a renewed Lebanese government, siding with the Lebanese protesters who call for a deep change in Lebanon’s political systems. United States of America has also been an important country during the negotiations for the Taif Agreement since the USA had close relationships with Syria and other Middle Eastern countries, demonstrating an interest in Middle Eastern topics.

## *Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (UAE)*

The foregoing countries are all geographically close to Lebanon, as well as being politically involved with many previous events in Lebanon; however, the countries are currently taking defensive positions in the issue by evacuating their citizens from Lebanon and warning the remaining citizens to be careful of the heated circumstances as citizens face acute humanitarian threats because the unstable political state Lebanon is in.





## Chronology of Important Events

Date	Description of Event
<b>April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1975-October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1990</b>	Lebanese Civil War starts
<b>March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1978</b>	Establishment of the UNIFIL
<b>October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1989</b>	Taif Agreement is signed
<b>July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015-2016</b>	2015-16 Lebanese Protests start
<b>October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019</b>	2019 Lebanese Protests continue

## Relevant International Documents

- Adopted by the Security Council, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1978 ([S/RES/426](#))
- Adopted by the Security Council, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1982 ([S/RES/520](#))
- Adopted by the Security Council, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019 ([S/RES/2485](#))
- [The Taif Agreement](#), October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1989

## Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

During the Lebanese Civil War, Israel and Syria were also involved which caused the United Nations to deploy a group of peacekeeping troops in the area to ease the tension on the Israeli-Lebanese border. This force is called the UNIFIL (see the section “Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)” for further information), and still acts as a peacekeeping organization only on the Israeli border. However, there are currently no peacekeeping forces in Lebanon to ease the tension within the citizens or the tension between the protesters and police officers. Currently, since the beginning of the ongoing protests, the only attempt to ease the tension in the country was the resignation of the Prime Minister; however, the protesters are still asking for deeper changes in the system, so it would be legitimate to say that the protests still need a more thorough attempt to resolve them.



## Solution Alternatives

Considering that the current protests are attributed to problems rooted in the Lebanese political system, it would be legitimate to say that the government needs to find a medium to communicate and negotiate with the Lebanese citizens, and after that, changes in the political system should be sought, as well as making necessary improvements in Lebanese economics. Some solution alternatives are given in bullet form below; delegates are encouraged to elaborate on the points to constitute their proposed solutions and/or clauses:

- Establishment of a representative council that consists of different citizens from different sects in order to facilitate negotiation between the protesters and the government officials, elaborating on political and economic problems
- Proposal of alternative ways of governing Lebanon other than sectarianism, keeping in mind that sectarianism is not only a political term but also has deep social reflections within the society
- Placement of peacekeeping forces not only on specific borders, but also within the country; ensuring that the procedures do not violate international and/or Lebanese policies
- Provision of political and economic consultancy to the Lebanese government by international experts

## Bibliography

- "About." *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon*, [unifil.unmissions.org/about](http://unifil.unmissions.org/about). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Daher, Joseph. "Hezbollah, the Lebanese Sectarian State, and Sectarianism." *MEI*, 13 Apr. 2017, [www.mei.edu/publications/hezbollah-lebanese-sectarian-state-and-sectarianism](http://www.mei.edu/publications/hezbollah-lebanese-sectarian-state-and-sectarianism). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Ghaddar, Hanin. "Iran Is Losing the Middle East, Protests in Lebanon and Iraq Show." *Foreign Policy*, 22 Oct. 2019, [foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/22/iran-losing-middle-east-iraq-lebanon-protests-bad-governance/](https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/22/iran-losing-middle-east-iraq-lebanon-protests-bad-governance/). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.



- Gradstein, Linda. "Analyst: Israel Closely Watching Lebanon Protests." *Voa News*, 6 Nov. 2019, [www.voanews.com/middle-east/analyst-israel-closely-watching-lebanon-protests](http://www.voanews.com/middle-east/analyst-israel-closely-watching-lebanon-protests). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Gulf Business. "Kuwait, Saudi evacuate citizens from Lebanon as public protests continue." *Gulf Business*, 20 Oct. 2019, [gulfbusiness.com/kuwait-saudi-evacuate-citizens-lebanon-public-protests-continue/](http://gulfbusiness.com/kuwait-saudi-evacuate-citizens-lebanon-public-protests-continue/). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Knecht, Eric. "United States ready to work with new Lebanese government, President Aoun tweets." *Reuters*, 21 Nov. 2019, [www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-protests-usa/united-states-ready-to-work-with-new-lebanese-government-president-aoun-tweets-idUSKBN1XV1FY](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-protests-usa/united-states-ready-to-work-with-new-lebanese-government-president-aoun-tweets-idUSKBN1XV1FY). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Krayem, Hassan. "THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR AND THE TAIF AGREEMENT." *American University of Beirut*, [ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/pspa/conflict-resolution.html](http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/pspa/conflict-resolution.html). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- *Lebanese Protesters*. *IPI Global Observatory*. Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- "Lebanon protests: What is sectarianism and why is it a problem? | DW News." *YouTube*, 26 Oct. 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDxbG6wXtqY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDxbG6wXtqY). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Majed, Rima. "The Political (or Social) Economy of Sectarianism in Lebanon." *MEI*, 7 Nov. 2017, [www.mei.edu/publications/political-or-social-economy-sectarianism-lebanon](http://www.mei.edu/publications/political-or-social-economy-sectarianism-lebanon). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Noueihed, Lin, and Dana Khraiche. "Nationwide Protests Erupt in Lebanon as Economic Crisis Deepens." *Bloomberg*, 18 Oct. 2019, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-17/whatsapp-protests-erupt-in-lebanon-as-economic-crisis-deepens](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-17/whatsapp-protests-erupt-in-lebanon-as-economic-crisis-deepens). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- *Parliament of Lebanon*. *Wikipedia*. Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.
- Shahine, Alaa. "Saudi Arabia Isn't Rushing to Bail Out Beirut. The Reason Is Iran." *Bloomberg*, 25 Oct. 2019, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-25/beirut-protests-draw-a-careful-silence-from-saudi-arabia](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-25/beirut-protests-draw-a-careful-silence-from-saudi-arabia). Accessed 25 Dec. 2019.

## Useful Links

- CIA's World Factbook, Lebanon section: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>



Committee: United Nations Security Council (UNSC)  
Agenda Item: Taking measures to resolve political unrest in Lebanon  
Student Officer & Role: Zeynep Yılmaz & Vice President

- BBC's section for Lebanon-related news:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/c8nq32jwjydt/lebanon>

- AlJazeera's section for Lebanon-related news:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/topics/country/lebanon.html>

- Amnesty International's reports on Lebanese protests:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/lebanon-protests-explained/>