

Lebanese Election May Lead to Reforms or Collapse

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Saad Hariri, three-time Prime Minister from 2009 to 2021, announced his retirement from political life and has returned to his new home in Abu Dhabi. His announcement from Beirut on January 24 was followed by one of the worst snowstorms in recent history in Lebanon and Syria.

Hariri’s announcement sent a cold chill through many who had supported him and his Future Party, as the country faces a parliamentary election in May. He explained that he had failed at his goal of making life better for the Lebanese people. In October 2019 violent street protests broke out demonstrating against the wealthy political elites who were seen as corrupt and the cause of the worst economic melt-down of any county in the last 150 years, according to the World Bank.

Most analysts point to [Hariri’s working relationship with Hezbollah](#) which caused an end to his political career, with the US and Saudi Arabia pulling the plug.

Saad Hariri, like his father Rafik Hariri who died in 2015, was Prime Minister but was unable to form a government in 2021, and he left Lebanon to take up residence in the UAE.

The current de-facto leader of Saudi Arabia, Muhammed bin Salman (MBS), held Saad Hariri in 2017 against his will in a shake-down and caused Hariri to announce his resignation while in captivity. MBS was furious that Hariri had managed to work with Hezbollah in the political arena, even though his party was opposed to the group. It took French President Emmanuel Macron personally to gain the release of Hariri, where he returned to Beirut and rescinded his resignation.

Saad Hariri’s older brother, Bahaa Hariri, maybe the wild card in the political game in Lebanon. The charismatic businessman, with a personal fortune estimated by Forbes at \$2 billion, is rumored to be supported by both Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and Bahaa Hariri takes a harder line against Hezbollah than his brother.

Bahaa Hariri has formed a political advocacy group, “Sawa li Lubnan” (Together for Lebanon), which intends to support candidates for the May elections, especially reformists.

On Thursday Bahaa Hariri's media office announced the appointment of Safi Kalou as his political representative in Lebanon.

Bahaa Hariri, the eldest son of Rafik Hariri, has developed a unique style of citizen activism in Lebanon in response to the Lebanese crisis.

He has taken a tough stance on Hezbollah, which will be enticing to the US and KSA. His current campaign is raising billboards across Beirut, and has 10 offices in Lebanon, with a supporting TV campaign as well. The platform is secular, appealing to all Lebanese, and has a modern reform base ideology, which emphasizes national unity in the face of corruption reforms.

One political party leader has emerged and is a very old face on the scene. [Samir Geagea](#), the leader of the Lebanese Forces (LF) since 1986. The LF is a political party that began as an armed militia, with no connection to the national Lebanese Army.

Geagea, although representing a Christian sect, is the agent of Saudi Arabia in Lebanon, while his bitter rival is President Michel Aoun and his Free Patriotic Movement, who are the country's largest representatives of Christians.

Druze leader Walid Jumblatt said after the Hariri announcement, that he felt Hezbollah would gain from the situation, and he complained that Arab states were abandoning Lebanon. Jumblatt and Hariri had in the past formed a US-backed alliance called 'March 14'. Jumblatt pointed to the past ties with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates which used to spend billions on Lebanon but had cut ties because of Hezbollah. Jumblatt admitted that it is impossible to disarm Hezbollah.

Hezbollah, headed by Hassan Nasrallah, is a Lebanese resistance group that is supported by Iran and Syria. Israel is occupying Shebaa Farms, an area in the South of Lebanon, along with the Golan Heights in Syria, and Palestine. Despite multiple UN resolutions demanding Israel return to the 1967 borders, Israel instead steals even more land on the Occupied West Bank through illegal settlements.

Hezbollah was formed in 1982 in response to the brutal military occupation of the South of Lebanon for 18 years, ending in 2000. Unsurprisingly, the residents of the South of Lebanon are the community that most support Hezbollah. Those communities of Christians and Shiites were imprisoned, tortured, maimed, and killed by the Israeli occupation. Lebanese history has made the residents say it was Hezbollah's resistance that caused Israel to leave. In 2018, Hezbollah won a parliamentary majority.

Lebanon is a sectarian governed country, owing to the Saudi-negotiated Taif accord of 1989, next to the only secular country in the Middle East, Syria. The residents of Syria have an ideology rooted in resistance to the occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian land. This same spirit of resistance allowed the Syrian people, and their Army, to resist almost 11 years of US-NATO attack on Syria for 'regime change'. Syria and Lebanon have shared this resistance ideology, but there are divisions among the Lebanese population, with a sizeable portion who do not support Hezbollah but would rather the national Army of Lebanon by the only bearers of weapons in defense of the country and the borders. However, the Lebanese Army is very weak and needs an influx of funding to bring the army up to being capable of defending the nation. Saudi Arabia had pledged \$4 billion but refused to deliver the funds.

The leading secular party in Lebanon is also the oldest. The Syrian Social National Party (SSNP) was founded in 1932. Experts point to the sectarianism in Lebanon as the source of division that permeated during the civil war from 1975 to 1990.

“The Great Denial” is the title of a report on Lebanon issued last week by The World Bank, which accuses sectarian dynasties and warlords of creating the economic collapse which has plunged the residents into poverty and driven many to a mass migration abroad.

Lebanon on Thursday registered 9,199 new COVID-19 infections, the highest number of daily cases since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Health Ministry reported. The total number of infections reached 891,982, while the death toll from the virus went up by 16 to 9,544.

Snow, poverty, pandemic, and political instability are bringing suffering to the Lebanese people. Will Spring be the beginning of a bright future for Lebanon?

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