

# Lebanon Under Occupation, Financial Fraud and Sectarian Political Corruption

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**Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman** of Saudi Arabia met with French **President Emmanuel Macron** in Paris on June 16. One of the items on their agenda was Lebanon, which has close historical and language ties to France. The tiny Mediterranean country has been in financial collapse for several years, and has been without a president at its helm since October 31, 2022.

Lebanon suffers from financial problems linked to fraud accusations against the Central Bank chief, the military occupation of Shebaa Farms by Israel, and further suffers from a sectarian ruled political system that prevents a solution to the nation's woe.

Steven Sahiounie of MidEastDiscourse interviewed Maher Al-Dana, a Beirut based journalist who has contributed to multiple news agencies, and has covered the war in Syria. He is now the Information Director for the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP).

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**Steven Sahiounie (SS):** The SSNP published a video on their official Facebook page, which showed the SSNP military wing taking positions in the South of Lebanon on the border with Occupied Palestine.

**Maher Al-Dana (MA):** The video published was the same time as Hezbollah's training with live ammunition in the South of Lebanon. From what you know, could there be a possible operation in the near future?

First, what happened was the announcement of activating the military and resistance action in the SSNP and announcing that this party, which withdrew from its role of resistance as a result of the wrong previous decisions and calculations of previous leaders, has today reactivated its work in its natural arena, although the nationalist have never backed down

from this work. Neither in the Jewish occupation of the south, nor later in the July War, they also had a major, important and pivotal presence in the global war on Damascus.

As for today, in what is said about operation, this matter is determined by the requirements of the battle with the enemy and the requirements of confrontation, and we are present within a unified operations room of the resistance effort, which takes this decision and directs the resistance factions as needed.

**SS:** Interpol has issued a red notice arrest warrant for Riad Salameh of the Lebanese Central Bank on accusations of fraud, embezzlement and money laundering of the Lebanese people's money. In your opinion, will the corrupted Lebanese politicians prevent his arrest?

**MA:** Politicians in Lebanon and no one can protect Riad Salameh after today, but on the issue of Interpol, on the issue of international justice, this is something that needs discussion. No one can cover Riad Salameh, but the most important thing is that the political pressures on the Lebanese judiciary be lifted in order for it to move towards Riad Salameh first, towards all those who participated in wasting and stealing the money of the Lebanese, and towards everyone who smuggled money and deposits abroad, and this is a matter of priority. The battle today in corruption is not a battle against individuals, it is a battle against a system, Riad Salameh is one of its heads.

**SS:** Lebanon has been without a president for over seven months. The parliament should be meeting soon to elect a president, between Sulaiman Franjeh and Jihad Azour. In your opinion, will the politicians agree on a choice, or will they wait for foreign influence to make their choice?

**MA:** After the election session that was held on June 14, in the parliament, we can say that we are facing the reality that there are two candidates: a candidate whose team has burned him, and a candidate whose team continues to nominate him. Jihad Azour ended, it ended for several reasons.

First, whoever nominated him is not convinced of him, and he nominated him on the basis of the principle of conspiracy. As for Franjeh, he is a candidate on the basis principle and criteria that this team still believes in, and he will continue to nominate him for an indefinite period now, either by bringing him to the presidency of the republic or by changing circumstances. Therefore, whoever nominated Jihad Azour did not respect him, and he did not respect himself when he accepted that he be nominated by a team to manipulate him, and this matter requires scrutiny by those who nominated him, I mean, there is Minister Gebran Bassil who nominated him to maneuver, to say to the other team, come and talk to me, I am the helmsman's egg, while the other nominated him to overthrow Franjeh, and because he brings economic policies that this team has always pursued since the year 90, and this matter will not pass, and these people, if we remove Gebran Bassil aside, will not have any influence on the decision in the light of Lebanon's presence in this environment and in these circumstances, and therefore let us look at who can protect him and who can preserve the role that Lebanon plays within its surroundings.

**SS:** The SSNP foundation is based on secularism, while Lebanon is being divided and weakened by sectarianism. In your view, will the new agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia have a positive effect on Lebanon, and what is the role of the SSNP in decreasing sectarianism in the region?

**MA:** The role of the SSNP has always been, and since its establishment, to fight the occupation of Palestine, the project for the establishment of a Jewish state that we consider an entity and it will disappear, as well as the project of sectarianism and fragmentation in our country, which only serves the occupation project.

We are fighting sectarianism with slogans, and indeed, we are always striving for the establishment of a civil state, and our project today at this stage is entitled the state of resistance and citizenship, and therefore it is unacceptable in the year 2023 for the sects to remain the ones that control the fate of the country.

Towards a citizen state, and towards a state of resistance, and these two things are interrelated, and the first factor does not deviate from the second factor completely.

**SS:** The resistance movements in Gaza and the Occupied West Bank have grown stronger and tensions have been increasing there. In your opinion, are we entering a new phase of resistance to the brutal military occupation of 6 million people?

**MA:** The resistance has never retreated. Rather, it has always accumulated its strength and accumulated its experiences and performance in order to make a difference and in order to reach the main goal, which is the liberation of the occupied territories. Within the context of the forties until today, we have seen where the resistance has become.

As for what is happening today in the West Bank, and what is happening in the Palestinian interior, it is the biggest blow to the Jewish project, which I believe is that by subjugating some leaders and some regimes, it can go towards subjugating the people, and this is something of course that has not happened and will not happen. Today, the security coordination officers who work with the Palestinian authority and coordinate with the enemy and the Shin Bet and Mossad agencies in order to pressure the resistance fighters, the sons of these people leave their homes to carry out stabbing and run-over operations against settlers and against members of the occupation army, and thus they dropped the idea of volunteering and dropped the idea of security coordination.

Our people are a living people that cannot, under any circumstances, give up their natural right to confront and liberate the land.

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