

Situation in Lebanon

Forum: Security Council

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Introduction

On August 4th, 2020, a devastating explosion that took place in the Port of Beirut, located in the capital city of Lebanon, once again highlighted the political corruption and social issues currently in Lebanon. Lebanon, a country located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, served as a commercial center for the Middle East for years with its sheer diversity of culture. Throughout history, this unique culture of tolerance to diversity has led them to be an asylum for diverse religious and ethnic groups. However, the government's struggle to unify the religious groups and to define its position concerning the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflicts led to numerous internal, external, and political disputes. Currently, Lebanon is facing a series of problems ranging from food insecurity to the liquidity crisis. With the economic and infrastructure instability in Lebanon, the problem of housing over 1.7 million Palestinian and Syrian refugees, along with the ways to provide sufficient support to the refugees, should be discussed as well.



A map of Lebanon and its neighboring countries

Model United Nations | International Schools Consortium

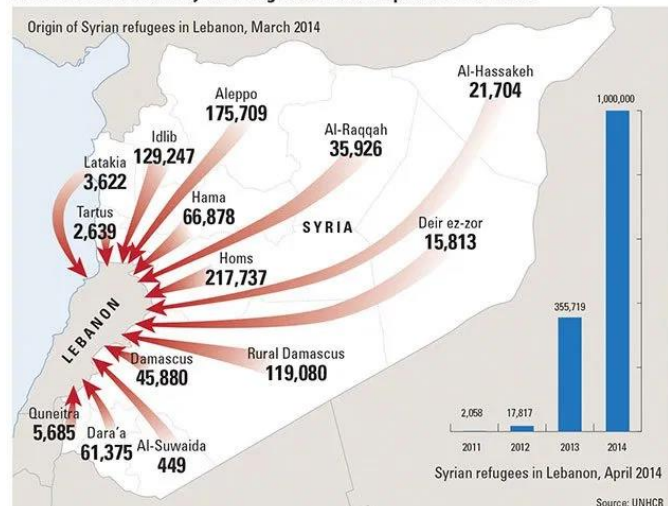
Background

History of Refugee Crises

Starting from the creation of Israel in 1948, a large number of Palestinian refugees settled in Lebanon. Even though the Lebanese government does not interfere with the Arab-Israeli conflict, numerous attacks take place in Lebanon as Palestinians use Lebanon as a base for attacks on Israel. Throughout the decades, more Palestinians sought asylum in Lebanon.

The start of the Syrian civil war on March 15th, 2011 led numerous Syrians to seek asylum in its neighboring country, Lebanon. By April of 2014, over one million Syrian refugees were registered in Lebanon according to the United Nations refugee agency. Such a high influx resulted in one out of four people living in Lebanon being Syrian refugees.

In 2014 the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon passed one million



An infographic showing the influx of Syrian refugees in 2014

The Lebanese Confessionalism

The Lebanese government was based upon confessionalism ever since its independence from France in 1944. Confessionalism refers to a government system where there is a proportional sharing of power between the country's religious communities. In the beginning, the distribution of seats in parliament favored Christian population with a ratio of six-to-five; in other words, for every 11 seats, six were taken by Christians, while the remaining five were taken by Muslims. In 1989, the parliamentary seats were equally redistributed between Christian and Muslim groups mainly because of the Lebanese Civil War.

Due to the influx of refugees, around 61% of the population is identified as Muslims, while the Christian population is estimated at 33.7% of the total population. The external pressures of the Arab-Israeli conflict led to the failure of delicately balance in confessionalism. Numerous attempts to unify the government have been taken in the past. Most recently, in 2009, Saad Hariri formed a unified government after his victory of parliamentary elections. However, this unified government collapsed in 2010 as the opposition party's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and allied ministers resigned.

The Lebanese Civil War

The Lebanese Civil War occurred from 1975 to 1990. The causes behind the war were multifaceted, but experts usually narrow down the main cause to the corrupted government's inability to mediate the long-lasting conflicts between political and religious groups. The war was originally between Christian groups and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); however, fearing that the nation would disintegrate into multiple nations, the Lebanese government asked the Syrian government to support the Christian groups and readdress the power imbalance between Christian militias and the PLO. The Syrian government accepted the request and started a large-scale intervention in 1976. As Palestinian militias in Lebanon continued to launch cross-border raids into Israel, Israelis started to intervene in the war by launching a major reprisal attack in 1978 and financing Christian militias.

In 1989, the war finally came to an end following the constitutional reform made by the parliament to equally redistribute parliamentary seats, senior administrative positions, and cabinet posts among Christian and Muslim officials. During the Lebanese Civil War, more than 100,000 people died, and one million people were displaced.

Problems Raised

Refugee Crisis

Currently, the Lebanese government estimates that 1.7 million refugees are in the country. Considering the weak infrastructure and political and economic instability, the Lebanese government has already reached its maximum capacity to host refugees. According to Human Rights Watch, 73% of Syrians in Lebanon lack legal residency. With the lack of legal residency, the refugees are restricted from having an occupation and accessing state-provided services including health and education.

Moreover, as the Lebanese government is implementing harsh policies on refugees, more than 170,000 Syrians returned to their country as no alternative option was available. On July 1st, 2019, the Lebanese Armed Force demolished 20 refugee shelters, increasing the

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pressures on refugees.

The Lebanese Liquidity Crisis

The Lebanese Liquidity Crisis started in August 2019, when the dollar exchange rate in the black market skyrocketed due to the probability that the Lebanese government will default on upcoming debt obligations. The United States' sanctions against Hezbollah, a Muslim political party and military group in Lebanon classified as a terrorist group in the US, deepened the economic crisis as well. As the inflow of dollars decreased, banks had to shut down as they were no longer able to pay depositors, and the currency collapsed from 1500 Lebanese Pounds for a dollar to 8000 Lebanese Pounds a dollar. The failures of previous politicians to properly manage the money and to rein in spending are seen as causes of the liquidity crisis as well. In 2020, the outbreak of pandemic has further exacerbated the situation. Currently, Lebanon has a debt of \$90 billion, which is around 170% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Due to the liquidity crisis, 25,000 people lost their jobs, around 800 restaurants were closed in three months, and more than 1 million people are living below the poverty line.

Anti-government Protests and the Freedom of Assembly

As the shortage of foreign money continued, the Lebanese government announced new taxes to be imposed on tobacco, petrol, and messaging services including WhatsApp. After hearing the new proposal, the Lebanese went out to the streets to protest against Prime Minister Saad Hariri on October 17th, 2019. As the existing tax system is already in favor of the rich, imposing more burden on all citizens to resolve the financial crisis instead of increasing the amount of tax



A picture of the protest

paid by the rich was unacceptable for the protestors. Even before the protests, people were already dissatisfied with the government's failure to provide basic services. The Lebanese had to endure daily power cuts, a lack of sanitized water, and limited public healthcare. On October 29th, in response to the mass protest, Saad Hariri resigned. Even after the resignation of Saad Hariri, as most of the corrupted political elites remained in power, the protest continued with the aim of political revolution.

During the protest, Human Rights Watch reported the usage of tear gas and rubber bullets on protestors by security forces. Moreover, the authorities have been detaining individuals who expressed their concern about the country's economic situation and alleged corruption. Security agencies, including the Internal Security Forces' cybercrimes bureau, have been censoring the internet and interrogating activists over peaceful speech.

2020 Beirut Port Explosion

On August 4th, 2020, A large blast in the Lebanese capital Beirut claimed 200 lives and injured 5,000 people. The explosion was preceded by a fire on the warehouse at the port, which stored 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate. Soon after the fire ignited, a colossal explosion sent a supersonic blast wave



Satellite images of the Beirut blast site before and after the event

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throughout the city. The blast wave damaged the houses of more than 300,000 Lebanese people. It is estimated that the loss created by the disaster reached \$15 billion, adding a burden to the ongoing economic crisis. Through further investigation, it was revealed that the ammonium nitrate was unsafely stored in the warehouse for more than six years. The explosion once again showed the lack of safety measures and incapability of the Lebanese government to prevent the tragedy beforehand. This tragedy reignited the anti-government protest for the replacement of inept political figures.

COVID-19 in Lebanon

Lebanon was struck by the global pandemic as well. As of January 10th, 2020, the health ministry reported 215, 553 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,590 associated deaths since the start of the pandemic. Even though the government imposed local lockdowns and night-time curfews, the positive cases have been surging in the past few months. In November 2020, in an attempt to avoid Lebanon's fragile health system becoming overwhelmed, a nationwide lockdown was imposed for two weeks. Such a lockdown has negatively impacted the already deteriorating economic sector of Lebanon. Human Rights Watch reported the government's failure in protecting health workers that are the backbone of Lebanon as COVID-19 cases are surging.

UN/International Actions

Numerous United Nations' Agencies and member states have been aiding Lebanon with different measures. After the 2020 Beirut Port Explosion, the World Health Organization made an emergency appeal to provide the Lebanese with follow-up care for the injured, to rebuild destroyed hospitals, and to enable access to basic health services. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the United Arab Emirates have sent personal protective equipment, medicine, and surgical equipment to Lebanon after the explosion. More than 20 countries around the world pledged their support and offered for the restoration process. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also showed its inclination to increase efforts to help Lebanon in its financial crisis. However, the IMF also stated that all the governmental institutions in Lebanon should show willingness for reforms.

The P5 Nations' Stances

China

China is the top trading partner of Lebanon. Starting from early 2010, China and Lebanon have steadily developed cooperation in fields including economy, culture, and education. Regarding the problem of Hezbollah, China maintains its neutral stance. China also shows great interest in investing in Lebanon, which may help Lebanon from its financial crisis.

France

Lebanon was under France's mandate until its independence in 1944. Currently, France is leading a collaborative, international effort to tackle the political corruptions in Lebanon. On December 12th, 2020, France has urged the formation of a new government in Lebanon. After

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the Beirut Port Explosion, France sent 55 security personnel along with 6 tons of health equipment and 10 emergency doctors.

Russian Federation

Russia and Lebanon have a bilateral relationship. In recent years, Russia has shown deep interests in Lebanon's gas fields and has been increasing its interference in the Lebanese energy market. In early 2018, the Lebanese government allowed a Russian energy company to explore natural gas in its territorial waters. Experts see this increased interest of Russia as Russia's vision to expand its navy's power in the Mediterranean Sea. After the explosion at the Beirut port, Russia sent five planes carrying medical equipment and medical personnel.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has a bilateral relationship with Lebanon. When the anti-government protest reached its peak in 2019, the United Kingdom supported the creation of new government in Lebanon. At a global summit that took place after the Beirut Port Explosion, the United Kingdom pledged to "stand by the Lebanese people," to send 20 million pounds worth of food packages, and to support the British Red Cross for the emergency relief effort in Lebanon.

United States of America

The United States has been Lebanon's security partner since 2006. The United States have been providing more than \$2 billion in security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). As the United States is strongly against Hezbollah, the United States has been imposing sanctions on Lebanese politicians allied with Hezbollah. This included Lebanon's former foreign minister, as well as Gebran Bassil, the Lebanese president's son-in-law.

Possible Solutions

1. *Political Stability:* First and foremost, the problem of political corruption in Lebanon should be tackled. The new government should aim to solve the deeply rooted problems of confessionalism. Lebanon can receive external help to establish a stable government; however, it should not rely heavily on foreign nations as it may create problems like it did during the Arab-Israeli conflict. Because the main reason why many countries are being hesitant to help Lebanon and why the Lebanese are protesting are due to the country's reluctance to undergo reform, showing signs of a willingness to reform would help the nation. Ways to ensure the transparency of the new government, including the interference of Transparency International, should be sought. Furthermore, continuous international efforts to restore the infrastructures in Beirut and for the refugees are needed.
2. *Establishment of a Health Care System:* The accessibility of a health care system especially in this era of COVID-19 should be ensured. Measures to secure the transparency of aid should be taken. A possible strategy that can be embraced by donors is implementing the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard. The corporation with IATI and the donors allow the data regarding the humanitarian projects more accessible to everyone.

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3. *Economic Reform:* The major causes of the declining economy are that the government is importing more than exporting and is constantly borrowing dollars from foreign countries. Investment in areas such as agriculture and natural resources can reduce its dependency on imports and increase exports. Especially, measures to reduce the degree of energy imports should be highly sought after as imported oil products account for 90% of total primary energy demand in the country.

Glossary

Ammonium Nitrate: a chemical that is mostly used for fertilizers and explosives for mining; if a large quantity of ammonium nitrate is exposed to moisture and fire, the chemical reaction can be much more intense

Blast Wave: an intense over-pressurization impulse produced by an explosion in air

Influx: an entry of large number of people or objects

Liquidity: the measure of how firms, nations, or individuals can quickly convert their assets into cash; if liquidity is high, it means that they are easily able to meet short-term debts

Timeline

1943 March: Parliamentary seats are distributed in a way that favors Christian population on a ratio of six-to-five

1944: Lebanon becomes independent from France

1975 April: The Lebanese Civil War starts

1976: Lebanon asks the Syrian government for help; Syria starts large-scale interventions in the Lebanese Civil War

1978: Israel launches a major reprisal attack, which includes invasion of southern Lebanon seized by the PLO

1989: Parliamentary seats are redistributed

1990: End of the Lebanese Civil War

2014: With the start of the Syrian Civil War, many Syrian refugees flee to Lebanon

2019 August: The Lebanese Liquidity Crisis starts; the exchange rate starts to fall

2019 October: Anti-government protests start due to the imposition of new taxes

2020 February: COVID-19 starts to spread in Lebanon

2020 August 4th: The Beirut Port Explosion results in 5,000 casualties

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