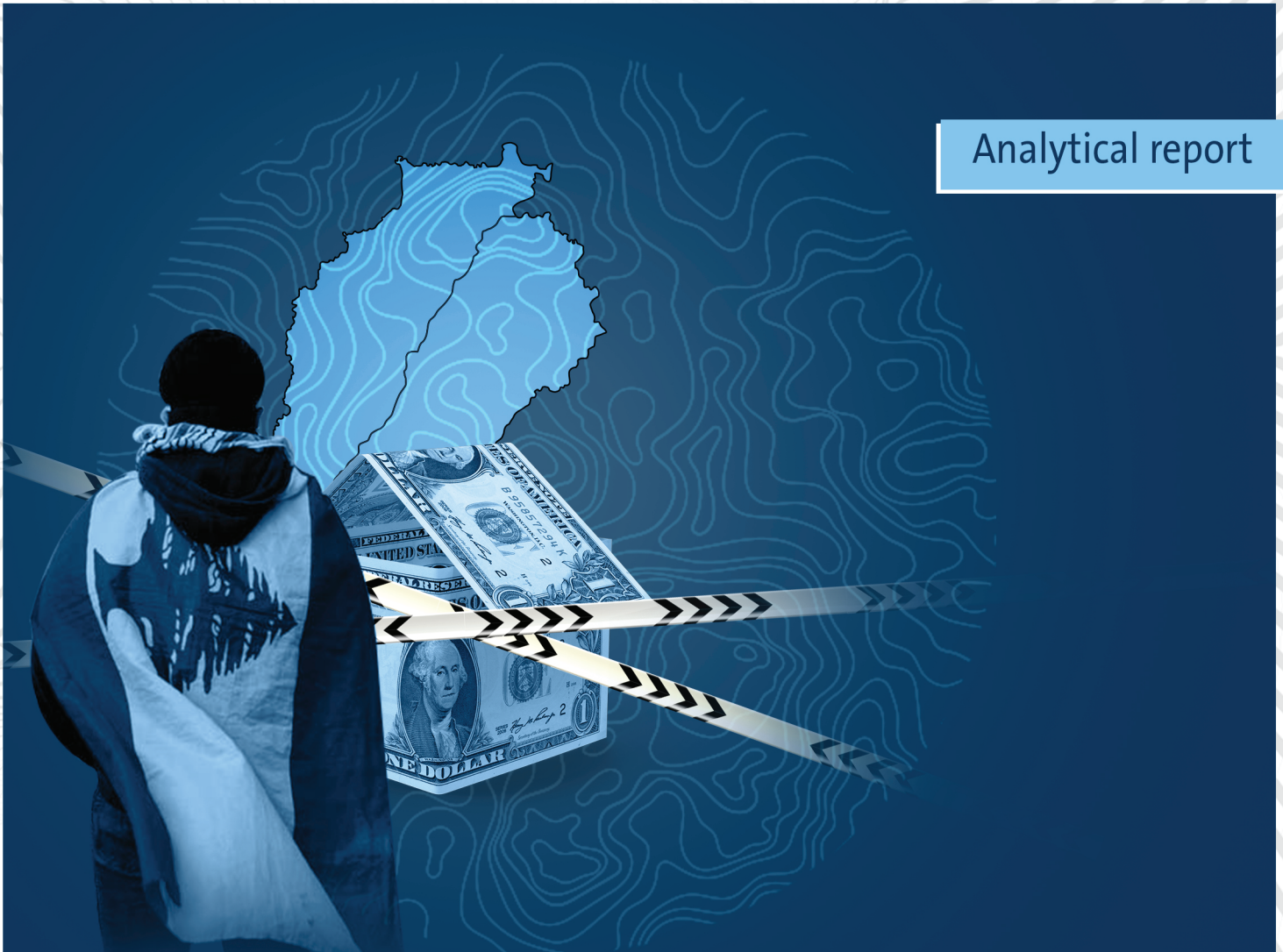




Dimensions
for Strategic Studies

Analytical report



Dangers looming on the Lebanese horizon

Order and formula under threat

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07 MARCH 2022
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Dimensions for Strategic Studies

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Preamble

For nearly two years, Lebanon has been in a state of an impasse at the political and economic levels. There is a major decline in Arab and international confidence in it, as Arab and European countries, along with the United States, see that “Hezbollah” dominates Lebanon and confiscates the sovereignty of the country. Arab and international aid have been withheld from Lebanon; though it has long been accustomed to receiving foreign aid, as the resumption of that aid has been tied to harsh conditions, which seem to be difficult for the state to meet. This includes reforms and revisions at the political, legal, social and economic levels. Add to that combating corruption and preventing smuggling in all its forms.

In light of the aforementioned, Lebanon is currently threatened with demise or changing or modifying its political system, which is currently based on a kind of balance between its sectarian components, making the balance tilt in the interest of one party at the expense of the rest, in a country based mainly on what is known as “democratic consociationalism”, and on the charter that gives sects a kind of immunity or “veto”, knowing that this matter made them stronger than the state and its institutions.

Consequently, Lebanon faces imminent challenges at the present time, and imminent dangers in the near future, with the absence of any signs of solutions on the foreseeable future. The most prominent of those challenges, the potential risks, the causes and how can they be faced, and the expected scenarios for the coming period are the focus of this report



First: causes of the crisis: historical course of events

At the beginning of September 1920, and as one of the results of the First World War, in which the “allies” (Britain, France and their allies) won over the “axis” (Germany and its allies), General Henri Gouraud, commissioned by his French government, announced the establishment of the state of “Greater Lebanon”, With its currently known borders, i.e. from Naqoura in the south on the borders of Palestine to Nahr al-Kabir in the north on the border with Syria, and from the Mediterranean in the west to the edges of the eastern Lebanon mountain range, along with the regions of the Bekaa Valley, Jabal Amel (south), Tripoli, Beirut and the Akkar Plain which were attached to the areas that were known at the time of the Ottoman Empire as Jabal Lebanon, which was subject to a system called the “Mutasarrifiya System”.

General Gouraud, and behind him France, gave the Christians in Lebanon, and the Maronites in particular, essential powers in the new Lebanese system, whereby broad powers were granted to the President of the Republic, who was dedicated by custom as a Maronite president, while the government - as an executive authority- is accountable to the Parliament, and with no actual or real decision-making power.

Later, the French government, before its departure from Lebanon when the mandate was terminated and the country declared independence in 1943, granted most of the main positions in the state and the regime to the Maronite Christians, making the positions of army commander, governor of the central bank, head of the Supreme Judicial Council, director general of public security and others the main positions, marginalizing the presence and role of the remaining Lebanese parties and components.



This aroused the resentment of many of those Lebanese components who considered themselves marginalized, and they contributed to the outbreak of the 1958 revolution (the direct cause was the support of the then Lebanese President Camille Chamoun for the “Baghdad Pact” in contrast to the rejection of this alliance by Lebanese forces and their support for Abdel-Gamal Nasser of Egypt.

The imbalance of powers in Lebanon, with the expansion of the armed Palestinian presence in the country, led in 1975 to the outbreak of armed confrontations and events, which turned into a civil war that did not stop until 1990, after a new settlement was concluded in 1989, represented by the National Accord Document, which was known as the The “Taif Agreement” refers to the city Taif, Saudi Arabia, where the document was signed.

The Taif Agreement, which came under international-Arab auspices, introduced some reforms to the previous system, reforms that established a kind of balance between the authorities on the one hand and the sectarian components on the other hand, and made the Parliament equally divided between Muslims and Christians, after the constitution granted Christians a greater number of deputies. The most prominent reforms were represented in taking some of the powers of the President of the Republic and placing them in the Council of Ministers as a whole, whose presidency is traditionally allocated to the Sunnis (and the presidency of the House of Representatives to the Shiits.

The civil war stopped after the Taif Agreement, but sectarianism deepened further, noting that a number of the provisions of the agreement were not implemented, including the establishment of an electoral law outside the sectarian constraint, and the election of a parliament on a national, non-sectarian basis, provided that after that a Senate is created to represent dignitaries and confined to crucial issues.

With the end of the war in 1990, the Syrian regime sponsored the implementation of the Taif Agreement by virtue of its military presence in Lebanon, but in a fragmented and incomplete manner, while it began to play on internal balances in an attempt to consolidate the hegemony of one group at the expense of another.



This was demonstrated by the great support provided by the regime in Syria to the Shiite community, mainly by keeping weapons in its possession under the rubric of “resisting the Israeli enemy,” as Israel occupied a large part of southern Lebanon. It should be noted that the majority of the Shiite community in Lebanon lives in the south, or that its birthplace is in the south, which made it possible to keep arms with it, especially in light of the alliance of the regime of President Hafez al-Assad with Iran, which supported the Shiites in general and Hezbollah in particular.

In the aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, the debate opened in the country about the presence of the Syrian force. Christians, in particular called for their exit from Lebanon, and for the implementation of the provisions of the Taif Agreement in this regard. Then the demand expanded to include Muslim and Druze forces, culminating in the withdrawal of those forces from Lebanon by late April 2005, about two months after the assassination of the former Lebanese prime minister, Rafik Hariri in Beirut on February 14.

After the Syrian withdrawal, a new stage of the Lebanese division began, as the Lebanese divided into two groups, the first being an ally of the Syrian regime and the second an opponent, in what was known as the “March 8” and “March 14” teams. This division continued in its sharp form, for many years, during which the country witnessed dangerous and prominent stations that almost plunged it into a new civil war; perhaps the most prominent of which was the military control of “Hezbollah” and its allies over Beirut for several days, in May 2008 (what was known as “The events of May 7th”), as well as the waves of explosions that struck Lebanon; especially the southern suburbs of Beirut, the stronghold of “Hezbollah”, in the first years of the outbreak of the Syrian revolution.

At the economic dimension, the successive governments, after the end of the civil war, adopted economic and financial policies based on the principle of borrowing from abroad for reconstruction.



These policies had negative effects in the long run, as they accumulated the size of the public debt and the budget deficit; especially since they coincided with the phenomenon of corruption in state administrations was wide spreading under the well-known sponsorship of the guardianship authority, which was represented by the Syrian regime at the time, and under the protection provided directly or indirectly by sectarian quotas and sectarianism that swept the management positions in the system.

In light of the continuing budget deficit, the level of public debt reached a record high of more than 100\$ billion, a figure that made Lebanon unable to repay its debts. Lebanon had to implement the conditions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, before obtaining any opportunity to finance the local economic cycle. It has witnessed a stifling financial and economic crisis since 2019, accompanied by its escalation with the outbreak of the so-called “October 17 revolution”, as the country witnessed protests for months, in light of the faltering Lebanese banks, and their failure to pay depositors’ money, while the price of the Lebanese pound deteriorated, to lose More than %90 of its value against the dollar, in a country pricing everything by the dollar and living on borrowing

In another place, the presence of weapons outside the framework of the official forces provided a kind of hegemony that upset the existing balance, and threatened to get things out of control; especially in light of the use of weapons more than once inside the country. This hegemony had negative effects, including delaying the formation of governments, or forcing political forces to adopt a certain opinion in terms of forming or dismissing some governments, as in the dismissal of the government of Saad Hariri in 2011, as well as postponing the election of a president for more than two years until the election of a president was completed by having Michel Aoun in 2016.

This situation created a kind of feeling of hegemony over the country from the group that owns the weapons; namely and exclusively Hezbollah. That widened the rift between the Lebanese until the issue of identity and the struggle to preserve presence, became more important in the eyes of the Lebanese than obtaining a livelihood.



This has emerged recently, as the economic and living crisis reaching unprecedented levels did not move the Lebanese people, who remained an issue. Fear of belonging and identity is more important to them than anything else.

In sum, Lebanon is living today in a state of blockage of the horizon for political solutions on the one hand, and an economic crisis on the other. In addition to that, there is the rupture with the Arab neighbourhood, especially the Gulf region. And all that was because of the internal division and the policies followed, as well as the state's loss of its ability to fulfill its obligations.



Second: Risks and challenges

In light of the current economic crisis, the obstruction of the horizon for a political solution, and the lack of trust among the Lebanese, where every component have their view of the country, the continuation of such a Lebanese formula in its current form is not easy, and threatens the Lebanese entity and forecasts the formation of a new entity on its ruins.

In some closed rooms in Lebanon, Lebanon has already begun searching for a formula for the new entity. In this context, the Maronite Patriarchate was presented with a formula for the adoption of a sectarian federal system, but no official position was issued by the Patriarchate, which sent a report in this regard to the Vatican.

The continuation of the economic crisis and the accelerating state of collapse expedites the decline and weakness of the state's capacity in favor of chaos, with the possibility of producing regional and local forces that may at one moment constitute an alternative to the state and the basis for any federal system that is a prelude to dividing the country into sectarian states.

In addition to the challenge of preserving the Lebanese entity in its current form, there is also the challenge of maintaining the internal balance between the various components. That requires ensuring the continuity of the state, and launching the fight against corruption and reform processes, knowing that corruption and the absence of reform are an essential reasons that have brought things to what they have reached today.

In this context, there is talk about strenuous attempts to bring about an amendment into the political system in which a group or component of the Lebanese will prevail at the expense of the rest of the parties and components.



More than once, directly and indirectly, the issue of a tripartite governing system was raised, meaning that power in Lebanon is distributed between three parties and basic components, namely Christians, Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims, bearing in mind that the current political system is based on the principle of equal division between Muslims and Christians.

To this day, this suggestion has not found a legitimate father, but some observers believe that part of the Shiites of Lebanon are seeking to bring about this modification in the political system and produce the tripartite formula, because it will be a more guarantee for them to continue to dominate power in Lebanon. Of course, this proposition does not receive any response from Christians, or from Sunni Muslims, or from part of the Shiites in the country, but it remains present in the shadow of internal and external equations and regional balances of power.

In addition to the two previous challenges, there is another challenge represented in re-establishing power in Lebanon by holding the parliamentary elections on the fifteenth of May, and betting on reversing the balance of power within the Parliament, so that the ruling parliamentary majority currently turns, and is loyal to the majority; Hezbollah, and allies of Iran and the Syrian regime, to a majority that is in the other direction. This reconfiguration of power, through elections, will limit, even temporarily or partially, the control of the Iranian-Syrian team over the country, and will open the way for the practice of a policy that is more in line with the Arab depth on the one hand, and the international community on the other. However, this does not mean the end of crises or permanent stability, but rather it will mean the continuation of the state of stagnation pending the crystallisation of a specific formula for solutions in the whole region, and the continuation of the policy of searching for temporary or partial solutions to the Lebanese progenous crises.



Third: Possible scenarios

It is possible to put forward a number of scenarios for what Lebanon may witness in the coming period, knowing that the arrangement of these scenarios in the following figure does not mean ordering them from the most to the least likely, or vice versa, but rather it is a census of these scenarios or most of them with a weighting percentage and the probability of their occurrence.

The first scenario is holding the parliamentary elections on time, with the aim of working to re-establish power, especially since the new parliament will be tasked with forming a new government and electing a new president at the end of next summer. Everyone in Lebanon views these elections as a fateful entitlement and deals with them on this basis. However, holding the elections according to the current electoral law, which depends on proportionality with the so-called “one preferential vote”, and with the division of Lebanon into 15 electoral districts, means that the chance for change through the ballot boxes is small, and that the most that can happen is for the majority in the parliament to shift weight from one group to another, with a very small margin that allows any small political force to play the role of mediator, or what is called “the weight of the egg”.

Of course, such a result means that any team that can win a majority of Parliament seats cannot rule alone, and therefore the continuation of the state of stagnation, crisis and waiting, and to Lebanon remaining governed by more pressure, which could later lead to the emergence of another new scenario that completely transforms the situation.



The second scenario is that parliamentary elections are not held for any reason, which will mean more elections. As such, the crisis deepens and the prospect of a political solution is blocked; which will lead the country into a debate over the constitutionality of the Parliament and questioning it after the expiry of its mandate next May, and thus questioning the constitutionality of any step it can take, including the election of a new president at the end of next summer. In other words, the failure to hold elections will complicate the political scene and will be a door to suggesting an amendment to the political system at a moment of internal and external crisis, resulting in a new political system that comes as a result of a deal between regional powers, or subject to the desire or dominance of the partners in the country over the rest.

The formula of the current political system, in light of the dominant balance of power on the ground and in the region, will appear incapable of producing solutions for Lebanon; and we have seen some of this during the last decade, when the election of a President of the Republic was suspended until consensus was reached on the election of the current President, Michel Aoun. This scenario would be tantamount to handing over the country to one party and acknowledging defeat in front of it, which is the ally of the Syrian regime and Iran in the region. This means that Lebanon will fall under that tutelage, perhaps for decades. But this scenario, as well as the first scenario, has in turn, establishes another and new scenario.

The third scenario is the one in which the existing entity can be demolished, in the interest of producing a new entity in Lebanon that meets the aspirations of the sects on the one hand and answers their questions and concerns on the other hand. This scenario is represented in switching to the expanded administrative and financial federal system as a prelude to dividing the country along religious or sectarian lines and possibly returning it to the pre1920- formula. However, without applying this scenario, there are obstacles, including the demographic overlap between Muslims and Christians, as well as between peoples in the rest of the country.



Small in size and may not be able to be divided. However, what is frightening in this scenario is that the Lebanese will be pushed into a kind of interim internal fighting that will re-sort the population, so that the Lebanese regions become more sectarian than before. Here, there is concern and fear that the Sunni presence and presence in Lebanon will be liquidated, especially in the main cities, including the capital Beirut and in the northern coastal city of Tripoli, the second largest city in the country, through the reproduction of the “ISIS” organization and its resurrection in the Sunni cities and metropolises. As a prelude to beating it and displacing its people from it, and even from Lebanon in general, or at least weakening them, especially since the Sunnis were known at the Lebanese political level for their moderation and their adherence to institutions, constitutionalism and stability of the state.

Of course, reaching this third scenario will mean the annihilation of Lebanon in the interest of producing new sectarian states, which are in constant need of care and protection from external forces, which will find in the oil and gas discovered in Lebanese waters in the Mediterranean the best source of financing for the care and protection of those states, which may move the conflict into each one of them.

Conclusion

Lebanon is facing an existential crisis, an entity and a system, at a time when the consensual formula for which it has long been known needs to be urgently addressed at the political, economic and social levels, and at the level of guaranteeing the sovereignty of the state, that should be the decision-maker through its constitutional institutions.

The civil war may be one of the outcomes of the pressure that Lebanon is under, while the upcoming parliamentary elections come as an opportunity for partial or slight change, which can be built upon for the upcoming stages.

On the other hand, the solution to the economic crisis requires the help of the international community and the Arab countries, while the two sides demand the Lebanese state to have real reforms that will put an end to corruption on the one hand and to dominate the country on the other hand;

at a time the demand to end using Lebanon as a base to target others, in reference to the interference of » Hizb Allah" regionally never stops.

Of course, the failure to reach solutions satisfactory to all parties, at the political and economic levels, will cause some forces to openly call for the adoption of federalism as a system of governing, which will serve as an introduction to dividing the country.



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