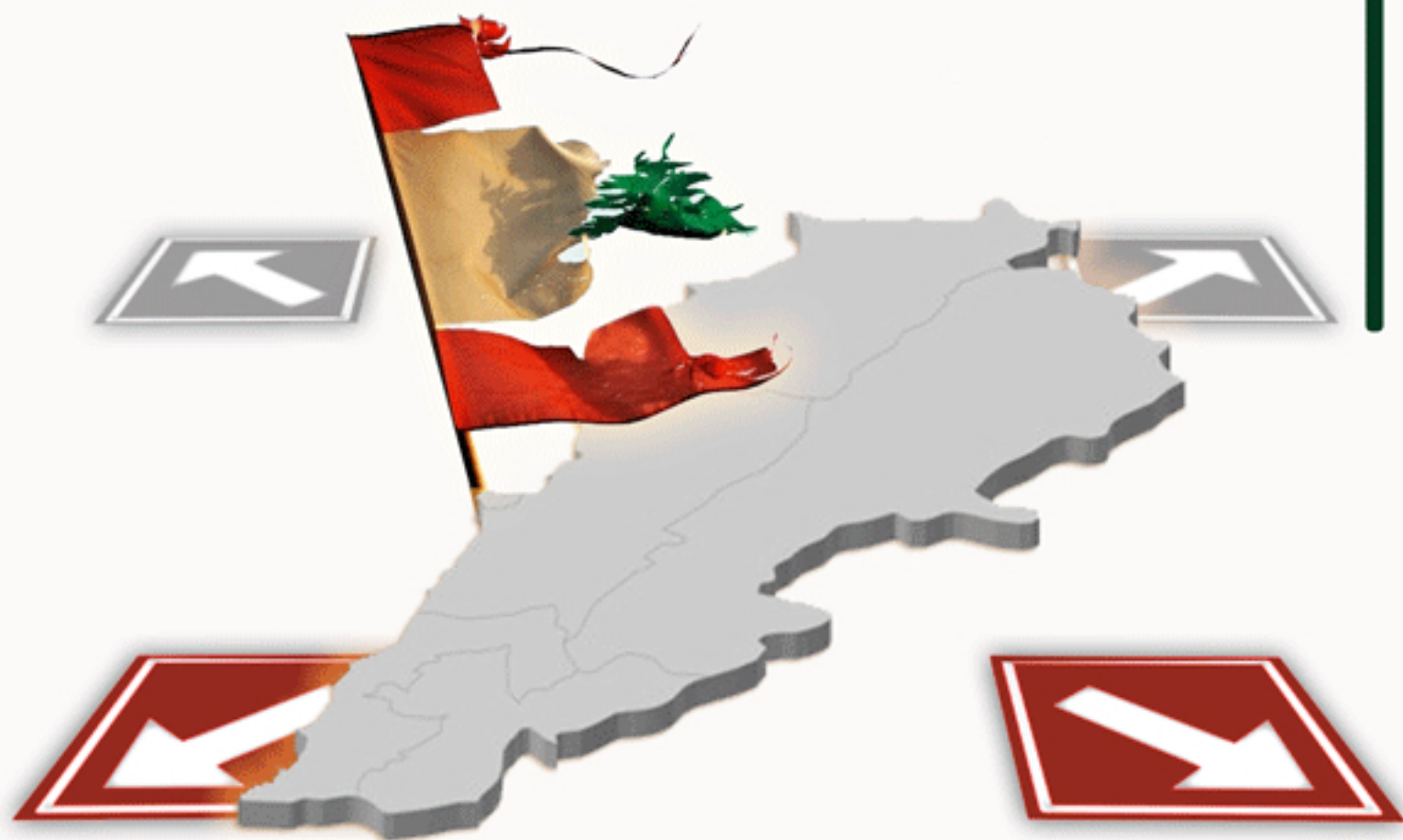




Policy Paper

# The Lebanese Crisis

## Forecasts and Pathways



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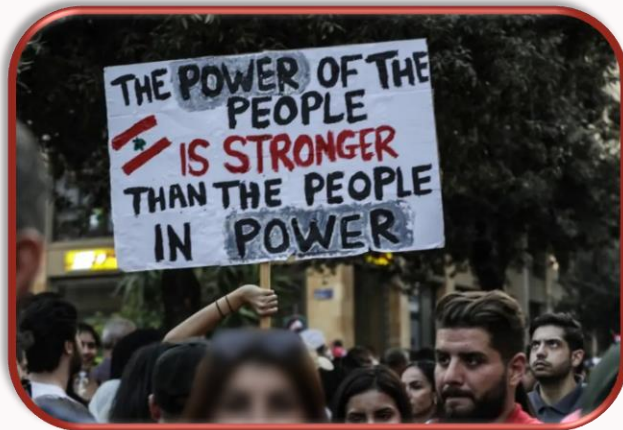
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## The Lebanese Crisis: Forecasts and Pathways

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Lebanon is currently undergoing difficult circumstances that threaten its political and social stability, amid increased internal political strife and regional tensions that together risk triggering a major explosion in the country. The nature of Lebanon's demographics, and the sectarian power-sharing political system, means that any dispute in Lebanon can quickly produce a high level of polarization. Since late 2019, Lebanon is witnessing sharp political polarization as well as the worst economic crisis since the end of the civil war, all in a landscape dominated by the struggle between the interests of regional and Western powers. The current crisis may not be the first crisis to have ravaged Lebanon, with many major crises blowing over the country since the establishment of Greater Lebanon in 1920, but it may be the most dangerous one, for it has become so multifaceted. Lebanon is swinging between two options: federalism and internal conflict, and between them there are multiple possibilities, some of which could be the modification of the system.



### First: The Key Determinants of the Lebanese Landscape

#### 1. A Hybrid Sectarian Composition

Since its inception, Lebanon has failed to form a unified national identity. The French created multiple leaders for multiple sectarian groups, distributing quotas among them. Consequently, Lebanon from the outset has been dominated by the fears of minorities and struggles between religious communities, with no inclusive national character existing in the Lebanese lexicon. Instead, contradictory, and conflicting visions emerged between the different Lebanese communities regarding various questions and issues, as a result of their sectarian leaders

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investing themselves in this reality and deepening the mutual fears between their communities. This meant that Lebanon's pluralism has been turned from a blessing the country can invest in, to a curse that formed a fertile ground for cyclical crises to emerge every 15 to 20 years. It also produced a set of complicated circumstances, including the collusion among sectarian leaders to maintain the system of sharing the spoils, corruption and public funds, with deep states nested inside the state. They deliberately weakened the state, working to turn citizens into loyalists allegiant to them instead of being equal citizens before the state. The sectarian leaders also often sought the sponsorship of outside powers to gain domestic political leverage, turning Lebanon an arena of constant regional and international competition.

Sectarian arithmetic governs the decisions of most Lebanese political, economic and social forces. This arithmetic is the foundation of the Lebanese power system, as its components seek to gain allegiance, confront their foes and summon regional forces to lend them support, building financial and political empires that are hard to dismantle. Thanks to this equation, Lebanese political forces share among them public funds and public sector posts, and the state declined in favor of sects and parties, while citizenship declined in favor of clientelism that has denied citizens their basic rights unless they pass through these forces and their leaders. Lately, one of the components has accumulated excess of power and has been trying to reflect it on politically.



## 2. A Fragile Economic Structure

The Lebanese economic crisis is complex and multifaceted, involving several factors:

- ▷ a. Weak economic structure that is overly reliant on an unproductive rentier economy, on account of the monetary policies that prioritized services and



foreign investments at the expense of the productive economy. However, both services and foreign investment are closely dependent on political and security stability and are vulnerable to instability. Lebanese banks adopted a policy focusing on attracting deposits from Lebanese expats abroad, but because of the government's addiction to debt to cover unchecked spending by politicians, the inflows from expats were depleted.



▷ b. Accumulated mismanagement and organized corruption, with reports indicating around \$52 billion were misappropriated from the state's coffers, with little known about how they were spent or squandered. On the other hand, there were no structural reforms carried out in public administrations and institutions, because of clientelism and the sectarian sharing system.

▷ c. The conflict between Iran and the United States spread to Lebanon, specifically in the framework of the banking sector. As a result, US dollar flows into Lebanon were restricted given the economic sanctions imposed by the US on the Syrian regime and Hizbullah, with some Lebanese banks accused of violating those sanctions.



▷ d. Arab Gulf countries ended their financial support and investments in Lebanon with Iran's growing influence over the country.

▷ e. Smuggling, especially of cash dollars and subsidised foodstuffs, as well as the greed of big dealers.

▷ f. The Covid-19 pandemic and the explosion at the Beirut Port, Lebanon's crucial economic artery.

The debt accumulated gradually, along with interests on the servicing of the debts in parallel with the inflated government spending bill. Thus, the balance of payments deficit increased over years of sluggish growth, a bloated banking sector that gives surreal interest on deposits, and public debt exceeded 170% of GDP. With the decline in the reserves of the Central Bank, the features of the accelerated collapse began with a severe liquidity crisis and a scarcity of the dollar. Banks



imposed restrictions on the withdrawal of the dollar and the transfer of funds, then came a default on the debts.

The Lebanese currency lost about 90% of its value. Three quarters of the Lebanese fell below the poverty line, triggering a brain drain and a mass exodus that will set Lebanon back by years. In addition, the extent of the social disruptions resulting from the crisis may produce social collapse and crime as a result of penury, which will constitute a fertile ground for infiltration, and may increase people's anti-government sentiment and action.



### 3. Chaotic Political Reality

Lebanon has a fundamental structural problem, whether concerning its state formation, decision-making process or respecting its constitution. It is blighted by a political class that wants to reproduce itself in power, and force the Lebanese to accept any solution. It wants to end all subsidies and implement austerity measures that could have been taken in a gradual manner before the crisis. Lebanon is also affected by the ramifications of the incoming presidential election, which Gebran Bassil wants to settle in his favour at any cost including by overturning the Taif Accord, restoring the presidential system or otherwise instate federalism in Lebanon. All of this is taking place because various parties are taking advantage of the stagnation period before the expected external settlement comes. That way they would be able to consolidate gains or stabilize or adjust the power balance.



#### ▷ a. Political Disintegration

All parties participating in power have seen—to varying degrees—a decline in popular trust, a disintegration of their alliances and mutual distrust between their components. They also lack a clear vision and a path forward. Their confidence in the political system has decreased amid growing calls for amending it. Most parties are preparing for worst case security scenarios, but



have no desire to see a civil war erupt. They are still resisting any change, seeking to rehash the system that was shaken by the protest movement beginning on 17/10/2019, and continue to secure their special interests through sectarian mobilization and fearmongering.

### ▷ b. Decline of the Sunni Influence in Contrast with the Growth of Other Communities' Clout

The Sunni constituency has lost its Arab backing and support, as a result of a shift in the Saudi policy vis-à-vis Lebanon and the absence of a rallying leadership. As a result, the Sunni political presence has weakened generally, creating a vacuum that may be tempting for other actors to exploit. The Sunni constituency is thus vulnerable to tensions and political and security exploitation.

By contrast, the Shia constituency has made arrangements that organize any political divergences within. It has been exploiting the community's armament and resistance against Israel, while being supported by Iran and its growing role in the region.

Within the Christian constituency, features have emerged of a Christian presence independent of Hizbullah. For the Maronite Patriarch has proposed the reaffirmation of Lebanese neutrality based on: Lebanon refraining from joining any regional alliances; regional and international powers refraining from intervening in Lebanese affairs; Lebanon standing in solidarity with human rights and national liberation causes, especially in the Arab world, including Palestinian rights; strengthening the Lebanese state, army, institutions, judiciary and internal cohesion; and addressing border issues with Israel and Syria.

### ▷ c. Popular Uprising

The economic policies and corruption were long expected to lead to the explosion of popular anger accumulated for years. This finally occurred on 17/10/2019, when a tax was proposed on WhatsApp users who otherwise enjoy free messaging and calling services, to provide additional income for the empty coffers of the treasury.



The popular uprising against the ruling authority system continued for months, in what was a thunderous cry against the rampant corruption and the sectarian spoil sharing system that had brought the country to its knees, aiming to find a solution outside the sectarian, political and regional frameworks. The uprising was paralyzed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but resumed albeit at a smaller scale after the huge explosion at the Beirut Port on 4/8/2020. However, the uprising failed to alter the downwards trajectory of the country.



The uprising faded sharply as a result of the economic crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, the opaqueness of the path ahead, and the infiltrations and political exploitation that afflicted its ranks. The decline of the uprising means it has failed for the time being, with the regime's core or so-called deep state remaining intact, the same core that the protesters wanted to topple and replace through early elections overseen by a neutral transitional government.

There are several key reasons why this uprising failed, most notably: Its failure to produce leaderships; the infiltration by conventional political parties; the scattered visions, objectives and agendas of the uprising groups that failed to unite around a common vision; and the regional and international meddling.

#### ▷ d. The Beirut Port Blast and the French Initiative

On 4/8/2020, a huge explosion rocked the Beirut Port. It was one of the most violent and biggest explosions ever recorded in the world. Following the explosion, French President Emmanuel Macron visited Beirut, addressing the locals with unusual emotion. He called on the political authorities to provide clear answers regarding their pledges to uphold the law, transparency, freedom, democracy and reform.

Macron returned to Beirut on 1/9/2020, meeting with the country's top political forces, and launched his initiative: Form a specialist government that would last six months, launch reforms, and oversee elections after reforming the electoral law.

On 8/9/2020, the US government imposed sanctions on Ali Hassan Khalil and Youssef Finianos, and the issue of the border demarcation with occupied Palestine was activated, undermining the French initiative. In addition, the Shia Duo (Amal-Hizbullah) was firm in rejecting any alternation of key government





posts, refusing for any other party to name any Shia-allocated ministerial portfolio. The political forces failed to form a government to steer Lebanon through its hardship, making any serious reforms extremely unlikely before the general election and the end of the term of President Michel Aoun.

As a result, the French initiative has been invalidated, and the French president failed to make a global success story as he had hoped, or to throw Lebanon a lifeline to save it from darkness and collapse.

#### 4. Foreign Intervention

The link between domestic tensions and regional geopolitics is no secret in the Middle East. In many cases, foreign intervention relies on domestic forces, and oftentimes domestic forces summon the help of foreign forces in their domestic conflicts. Hizbullah's involvement in regional conflicts further complicated the scene:



- ▷ a. **The US role:** Despite the shift in US priorities towards the conflict with China, the US role in the region remains fundamental in pursuing the Deal of the Century and the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab countries, amid the continued depletion of the region's resources. After a period of allowing Iran's proxies, including Hizbullah, to expand, so as to help the US extort the region's regimes (The invasion of Iraq phase 2003 and the nuclear agreement phase 2015). The US is putting financial pressure to weaken them and weaken Iran's ability to use Lebanon as a chip in international-regional negotiations. It also wants to include Lebanon in the normalization process with Israel (e.g. demarcation of maritime borders), and exploit the oil and gas resources in its waters.

The US administration has put high pressure on Lebanon through a de-facto economic blockade since the past five years. Through this, the US is pushing the Lebanese to anger against Hizbullah—which is making this job easier with its provocative conduct—and create popular pressure against increasing Iranian dominance by blaming it for the economic, social and political situation.



- ▷ **b. The Iranian role:** Lebanon is considered one of the key arenas of Iranian influence outside Iran, and a base for steering Iranian influence across the entire Arab region. The resistance against Israel for a period of time was an exceptional leverage for the Iranian project in the region in general and Lebanon in particular. However, the involvement in sectarian-type conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and elsewhere has undermined the large positive legacy accrued by Iran and Hizbullah over years, putting the latter in conflict with the Sunni arena in the region. In addition, Hizbullah's deployment of its weapons inside Lebanon to assert itself made it a divisive entity when it used to enjoy the support of a national consensus.



Iran has tremendous instruments of leverage in Lebanon and will concentrate its efforts on maintaining its influence during a period it sees as the peak of US pressure to reach a settlement, even if this leads to the entirety of Lebanon falling under the US “steamroller.” During this period, Iran will continue to seek to gain further leverage for negotiations, at the expense of others including the Sunni constituency in Lebanon.

- ▷ **c. The Russian role:** Russia has very little leverage cards in Lebanon. Instead, in the context of the competition for oil and gas, it relies on the need of the rival parties for a force that can settle matters in their favour, with some opportunities for some parties to seek Russia's support (Progressive Socialist Party, Free Patriotic Movement and Suleiman Franjeh) and the Syrian refugee return initiative that has stalled.



- ▷ **d. The European role,** especially the French role: It cannot be fully separated from the US path, albeit with some independent policies pursued by some Europeans led by France. However, the Europeans do not have independent and strong leverage cards in Lebanon, and their efforts remain limited to some initiatives that maintain their diplomatic engagement and secure some economic interests. In many cases, their focus is on preserving Christian minorities in the region.



- ▷ e. **The Israeli role:** Cannot be separated from the US trajectory. It seeks to secure its claims to oil and gas resources in Lebanese waters, contain Hizbullah's missile capabilities, monitor the political crisis, and benefit from chaos in Lebanon to create further domestic distractions for Hizbullah.
- ▷ f. **The role of the counter-revolution countries** in promoting normalization with Israel under the pretext of containing Iranian expansion in the region, targeting any popular reformist movement, and distracting or weakening Hizbullah with conflicts with Sunni Islamist forces with no real prospect of settlement.
- ▷ g. **The Turkish role** remains confined to monitoring the situation in Lebanon, social aid to limited groups such as the Lebanese Turkmen community, and not intervening in Lebanese affairs to accommodate its interests with other influential actors in Lebanon.



## 5. The Key Tension Spots in Lebanon and Their Implications

- ▷ a. **Parliamentary elections:** The US administration is seeking to create through the elections a new parliamentary majority that is more aligned with its objectives, including demarcating maritime borders, and settlement and normalization with Israel in the region. Whereas Hizbullah will seek to maintain its current majority in parliament, which gives it a broad margin of political manoeuvrability, and allows it to execute its agenda and that of its regional alliances. Other political parties will also seek to shore up their presence amidst the popular demands for change launched since the uprising of 17 October 2019.



- ▷ b. **Roving security tensions** of various scales and targets. Some seek to increase local tensions against Hizbullah fuelled by the latter's policies. Others seek to trigger media narratives or create crises that would allow certain parties make political gains, such as the Doha Agreement following the conflict of 7/6/2008. Other incidents aim to deflect away from the tensions against Hizbullah, the



most recent example was the Tayouneh Clashes that have witnessed political and judicial battles. These events were messages to those betting on securing a majority in the next election, while making a show force at a time of stalemate in the nuclear negotiations with Iran, and rallying supporters.

- ▷ **c. The battle to dominate the state** and weaken its role, and the role of the army and judiciary.

The most important implications of these tensions are: The increasing political-economic intractability; the accelerating collapse of the state with a crisis in fuel, electricity, healthcare, transport, bread, administration, and other sectors; the evolution of chaos in the street fuelled by certain political and security agendas; and increased internal tensions as a result of the internationalization of the Lebanese crisis.

### **Second: The Biggest Dangers and Potential Scenarios**

There are several possible scenarios for the development of the Lebanese crisis, which may be happen separately or in parallel. We will review them, and at the end the most likely scenario is concluded.

- ▷ 1. Given the critical situation in Lebanon and the potential for total collapse, political leaders may be prepared to undertake difficult austerity measures to prevent economic collapse, launch a roadmap to stabilize the economy, take control of liquidity and solicit immediate loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), while providing the necessary conditions to hold parliamentary elections.



- ▷ 2. The continuation of the status quo with increased internal and external pressures. No quick solutions are found, and the legislative elections could be postponed, leading to further deterioration, and economic, social and security chaos. The country is driven into de-facto partition, with the armed and security forces unable to control the situation. State institutions would collapse, and political parties administer their respective strongholds. This is the most dangerous scenario, subjecting the country to huge risks amid the collapse of the central government, leaving the borders open to refugees to head towards



Europe and beyond. The chaos may spread to other states, terror cells may be activated, and a regional conflict could erupt.

- ▷ 3. The United Nations Security Council would issue a resolution imposing international administration of Lebanon under Chapter VII, similar to Resolution 1559, or expanding the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)'s remit to cover the border with Syria. This is unlikely because of the potential Russian or Chinese veto. In addition, there is no operational capacity to implement any such resolutions without triggering military conflict in Lebanon.



- ▷ 4. An Israeli war is launched against Lebanon to disarm Hizbullah. Such a war would be even harsher than the 2006 conflict, and would destroy Lebanon. It would alter the internal political situation similar to what happened in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. This is a very unlikely scenario given the Israeli army's inability to settle such a war, and the lack of conducive internal, regional and international conditions for such a war.
- ▷ 5. US-Iranian negotiations advance and reach a deal on the nuclear program of Iran and other issues related to Iran's regional activities, including the role of Hizbullah in Lebanon. This could help reach political settlements in Lebanon and other countries in the region. This is a possible scenario, but may take a long time to reach fruition. It is unclear if its outcomes would be positive and produce quick solutions. This scenario also carries risks for Lebanon to become one of the spoils won by the stronger party at the expense of other weaker constituencies.

- ▷ 6. US pressures on Lebanon increase through further financial restrictions, to weaken the Lebanese chip being used by Iranian negotiators. The US also would put further pressure in the issue of demarcation of maritime borders between Lebanon and Occupied Palestine, while focusing on stabilizing the security situation, strengthening US-Lebanese ties, maintaining the monopoly of ruling class, continuing to work to contain Hizbullah and its relations with Iran, and trying



to shift the parliamentary majority in the next election. The US and France have so far failed to compel the main Lebanese political blocs to form a government that hold this vision.

- ▷ 7. The scenario where an alternative political, economic and security project takes hold. A government supported by a parliamentary majority is formed, and it pursues a pivot east, establishing economic ties with Syria, Iraq, Iran, Russia and China. One manifestation would be going further in importing Iranian goods and hydrocarbons to Lebanon.
- ▷ 8. The Lebanese system is amended amid increasing calls for federalism. Some parties sense that the current balance of power favours them in a way not reflected in their decision-making influence. Therefore, their interests lie in securing additional gains quickly before a regional-international grand bargain is struck. On the other hand, there is increasing resentment against Hizbullah's domination of Lebanese decision-making and increasing calls for federalism to mitigate it.



Considering the local political deadlock and foreign fluctuations, that the likely scenario is a composite one that includes:

- The continuation of the status quo, with further economic and security deterioration, with some mitigatory measures to prevent full collapse.
- The US administration would continue to seek to alter the political balance of power through the upcoming legislative election, and mobilize the public opinion against Hizbullah's practices, while pushing towards demarcating the southern maritime borders. However, there is the risk of postponing the elections, as a result of some authorities' fear of its results.
- All this pending reaching a deal with Iran concerning its nuclear program and its role in the region, including Hizbullah's role in Lebanon, which could help produce political settlements in Lebanon and other countries in the region.



### Third: Necessary Pathways for Solutions

Considering the complicated features of the Lebanese landscape and the multiplicity of potential scenarios and risks, the pathways of the solutions are also multiple and branched, covering political, economic and reform pathways.

#### 1. Political Pathways

##### ▷ a. Constitutional Pathway to Change

In a multi-confessional country such as Lebanon, where leaders hide behind sectarian allegiances to maintain their power, there is no benefit in adopting the logic of comprehensive revolution. Dismantling and reassembling constitutional institutions could trigger a level of chaos that cannot be reset except after an internal conflict that would require a full foreign sponsorship—similar to the civil war that produced the Taif Agreement—which would confiscate the Lebanese people’s decision in determining which citizenship-based state they seek.



Hence, it would be more expedient to adopt a constitutional path to change through legislative elections that redistributes power through the ballot boxes, and form a bloc from outside the ruling parties alignment or foreign allegiances. Next a president is elected from outside the traditional class who would inspire the electorate and restore their confidence in the state, accountable to the citizenry.

This path would prevent the confusion of state institutions or their collapse, or their absence in any sector or region. It would lead to the rebuilding of state



institutions and administrations on sound foundations, whether by reforming them or restructuring them according to a clear program and project. It would preclude the isolation of any region or the rise of federalism, by insisting on an inclusive national framework based on justice, fairness and transparency, on which all the Lebanese agree.

▷ **b. Forming an Alliance or a Coalition That Would Establish a State of Equal Citizenship and Institutions**

It is in the interest of the Lebanese to focus on shared issues, most importantly the issue of building a state of equal citizenship and institutions, and what this entails in terms of justice, equality and meritocracy instead of clientelism and sectarian quotas; upholding good governance through an independent



judiciary; anti-corruption measures; financial recovery through restoring stolen funds; balanced and equitable development; and asserting human rights in the security and judicial systems. Other features of such a state include respect for the constitution and not turning it into a point of view; and the separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches without neglecting oversight institutions or allowing any dispute between them to paralyze constitution life and using these for the good of the citizen not political parties.

In view of this objective shared by many Lebanese, it is necessary to build an alliance to establish a state of equal citizenship and institutions, gradually expanding to be strong enough to overcome the sectarian discourse used by the ruling class. This class need this discourse to rally support and maintain its survival, which is usually at the expense of the country's unity and stability. It is necessary to foster a popular pro-reform climate, where the largest possible number of Lebanese would rally around a number of goals, led by building an inclusive national identity, implementing the Taif Agreement, refusing armed insurrection against society, fighting corruption, reforming institutions and maintaining Lebanon's neutrality away from the conflict between regional alliances.

Creating such an alliance faces a number of challenges, most importantly: Adopting dialogue between various constituencies, instead of mutual escalation that could detonate the country; relinquishing the logic of might is





right, recklessness, or provocation; and pledging not to isolate any political constituency in the country.



### ▷ c. Keeping Lebanon From the Implications of Foreign Conflicts

It is not in the interests of Lebanon and the Lebanese for the country to become an arena for regional and international conflicts. The Lebanese must therefore be alert to attempts by parties to these conflicts to turn Lebanon into a post box, through which they send messages to each other, as has happened in recent times. Yet this pathway does not mean that Lebanon would give up its Arab identity and solidarity with Arab issues that have universal Arab support. However, Lebanon must not be used as an arena to settle score, or sow tensions with Arab countries at the behest of regional powers.

### ▷ d. Confronting Direct and Indirect Normalization with Israel

This pathway seeks alertness to the fact that the US plan to secure its economic interests and the security of Israel, is pushing to implement the Deal of the Century, which includes normalization with Israel. These aims are unacceptable and must be averted by Lebanon, yet without this meaning joining the opposite axis that has its own expansionist goals.

The pathway seeks to spread awareness that Lebanese neutrality in the conflicts of regional and international powers does not apply to the conflict with Israel, which involves an existential threat to Lebanon and is linked to the just Palestine issue.

In addition, one must advocate a defensive strategy for the Lebanese state based on developing and modernizing the army's capabilities to be able to defend the homeland and maintain its role as an inclusive national institution, while keeping it away from



political polarization or the battles of others. Lebanon must find a formula that maintains deterrence with Israel, liberate its territories and waters, and benefit from the experience and capabilities of resistance movements that have been active across the decades in Lebanon.

- ▷ e. Plugging any gaps to prevent any party from using radicalism and terrorism as a bargaining chip in the region's conflicts. This can be done through intellectual and scholarly dialogue with young people, ending arbitrary arrests and practices, including torture and abuse, respecting the freedom of expression, as long as it is within the law and public order, and not expanding prosecutions based on suspicion alone to both the guilty and the innocent. Detainees must not be tortured and civilians must not be tried before military courts. Finally, Lebanon must adopt a development policy that protects youths from extremism caused by poverty and lack of opportunity.

## 2. Economic Pathways

A plan to tackle the economic crisis must be put in place on two parallel tracks:

- ▷ a. **The resilience track:** A set of financial incentives, economic, monetary, and social measures would be taken; having sound negotiations with the IMF to restore financial balance and the ability to support citizens; and controlling the cross-border smuggling.



- ▷ b. **Economic recovery:** Through recovering stolen funds, reconsidering economic policies away from rentier models to productive models, stopping wastage, reducing the budget deficit, restructuring and trimming the public sector, adopting a meritocratic approach to public appointments, activating priority sectors and activating de-centralization. It is also proposed to draft a plan to leverage the resources of "Lebanese expatriates," after regaining their confidence through reform and policy adjustment, and encouraging them to invest in their homelands.

## 3. Reform Pathways

Given that a large part of the Lebanese crisis is a crisis of lost confidence in the governing system, as a result of the absence of an efficient government and good



governance, radical measures must be taken regarding the independence of the judiciary, the activation of national anti-corruption commission and other oversight and regulatory boards, the enforcement of freedom of access to information laws, and lifting banking secrecy on residents of Lebanon led by public sector employees. A process must be launched to recover stolen funds based on illicit enrichment laws, auditing the central bank and ministries' accounts, and reformulating the role of the banking sector to become creditors of the productive economy while keeping clear of interest rates policies that have drained the public coffers.

## Conclusion

Lebanon has been caught in international conflicts at a time when it is suffering a major political and economic crisis. It is ill prepared to cope with internal crises or foreign meddling, meaning there are a limited sets of possible forecasts for Lebanon: Either get rid of the corrupt system and mismanagement at home and maintaining neutrality in regional and international conflicts, or descend into the worst case scenario: federalism or internal conflict.

On those bases, the priority is to protect Lebanon as a country on the one hand, and increase the influence of advocates of the state of citizenship and institutions at the expense of sectarian investors, on the other hand. We must not give in to the idea that the solution is entirely from the outside and that it is inevitable but to wait for an external settlement, rather we must seek solutions that the masses of the various components choose, hence making the ruling elite concede and work professionally to save Lebanon, after it was exhausted by the conflicting interests of sects and presidencies.



This may sound difficult but it is not impossible, given the popular support for the notion of a citizenship-based state that has no room for sectarian quota sharing. This could lead towards multiple paths: The path of the political and constitutional reconstruction of the state; the pathway of real economic reform and recovery program; a pathway for implementing radical reforms for good governance; and the pathway of maintaining internal stability. Each pathway



requires a working plan that must be compatible with the aspirations of the Lebanese who are desperately awaiting salvation.



The recent deadlock in the process of forming a new government revealed dangerous structural flaws resulting from the violation of the Taif constitution and the failure to implement its clauses, especially those related to the ambiguous relations between Lebanon's constituencies and sects, and their often conflicting interests and visions regarding domestic and foreign policies, for example in relation to the Arab and Muslim worlds, the West and the position on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Therefore, no matter the scenario that Lebanon will undergo in the coming period, it is more expedient for the Lebanese forces, including the forces of the popular uprising, to adopt open dialogue with all other forces regarding fundamental issues, such as Lebanon's identity, the fate of Taif, abolishing political sectarianism, Lebanon's relations with its neighbourhood, the country's defensive strategy, economic, social, and development policies for the future. These must be balanced and equitable to exit the current crisis and protect Lebanon from future shocks. Agreeing on shared visions is the only way to build a real country, and the Lebanese have all the requirements of economic and political revival, if their energies and wills become bound together, far from foreign pressures and influences, no matter their sources.

