

'National hero' Iranian wrestling champion sentenced to death

Author:

Tue, 2020-09-01 23:51

LONDON: An Iranian wrestling champion has been sentenced to death for his role in anti-regime protests in 2018.

The Supreme Court confirmed that Navid Akfari would receive two death sentences, six and a half years in jail and 74 lashes, according to Persian-language broadcaster Iran International.

Saqeb Saba, editor of Iran International, told Arab News that Akfari's brothers Vahid and Habib were spared the death penalty but received prison sentences of 54 and 27 years respectively, as well as 74 lashes each.

The siblings allegedly participated in protests in 2018 that were triggered by the deteriorating economic situation in the country but morphed into an anti-regime movement.

The judiciary charged the brothers with 20 different crimes, including "attending illegal gatherings, assembly and conspiracy to commit crimes against national security, and insulting the supreme leader."

Akfari's case "is really, really upsetting for everybody," Saba said. "He was a national hero, and we don't even know the circumstances of his participation in the demonstrations."

Saba said Akfari was tortured into making false confessions against his brothers, and their lawyer has since said their confessions have no value in any court because of this.

Saba said the regime violently suppresses anyone who expresses dissatisfaction with it, even those who do so peacefully.

"The worst thing Akfari could've done was sympathizing with his friends', family's and compatriots' economic situations, but the way the regime has responded to these demonstrations is horrible – pure brutality," Saba added.

"This is the action of a regime that's frightened. The only way it can deal with a situation like this is brute force."

Iran is notorious for its extensive use of the death penalty, particularly against protestors and political detainees.

According to rights group Amnesty International, Iran is behind only China in executions carried out per year, and killed at least 251 people in 2019 alone.

Many of those executions are carried out publicly, and much like in the case

of the Akfari brothers, defendants are regularly subject to “systematic violations of fair trial rights,” Amnesty said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

Iran must quash death sentences against protesters: UN experts
Internet access in Iran disrupted as anger at protesters' death sentences grows

[Beirut: The city where streets still have French statesmen's names](#)

Tue, 2020-09-01 01:37

BEIRUT: After the French entered Lebanon in 1920 after the declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon, they reconfigured the capital Beirut to conform to the new political order.

Among the most visible transformations was the introduction of identity cards for residents, a move that sought to establish a Lebanese entity separated from other Arab states.

In 1921, the French mandate authorities conducted the first census of the Lebanese population, and on the basis of this the Lebanese were granted a new identity card in place of Ottoman tickets. The census was boycotted by those who refused to separate from Syria and recognize the new state.

The streets of Beirut, which were under Ottoman rule for more than four centuries, were referred to as haraat (alleyways).



The alleys were named after the families that inhabited them, leaders and princes, or even sects. The city's markets were named after the professions found in them, according to the records of the Sharia court in Beirut.

The French mandate authorities, however, changed the names after modifying the city's architecture. Twenty-meter streets were paved to connect the capital's neighborhoods and make life easier. And while the neighborhoods preserved the names of the families that lived in them, such as Al-Barbir, Al-Bashoura, Karm Al-Zaitoun, Zaroub Saba and Zaroub Al-Arawi, the mandate left its mark on modern streets by naming them after French generals and high commissioners who ruled Lebanon after the fall of Ottoman rule.

Although Lebanon won its independence in 1943, some prominent streets in Beirut still have the names of French generals who became famous during the two world wars.

Rue Gouraud is a residential and commercial street in Gemmayzeh in the Achrafieh district of Beirut. It is one of the trendiest thoroughfares, full of fine restaurants, French cafes and jazz bars.



General Henri Gouraud was the French high commissioner in Syria and Lebanon and army commander on the eastern side. Gouraud declared the State of Greater Lebanon from the porch of the Pine Residence in Beirut, and adopted the French military strategy known as “battle of annihilation.”

General Gouraud, who led the French forces in the famous Battle of Maysalun, lived on this street in Beirut.

A parallel street, Rue Pasteur, was named after the famous French scientist Louis Pasteur. It is also a commercial street and features shops of Lebanese innovators. Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) was a French chemist and one of the most important founders of medical microbiology. His medical discoveries contributed to reducing the fatality rate of puerperal fever, and he prepared vaccines against rabies and anthrax. He was known to the general public for inventing a method for pasteurizing milk.

The street adjacent to Beirut Municipality, Rue Weygand, bears the name of Maxime Weygand, a high-ranking officer in the Mandate-era French Army. He was the second high military commissioner appointed by France to rule Syria and Lebanon, from April 1923 to Nov. 29, 1924. Weygand, who saw action in both the world wars, died in 1965.

Rue Georges Catroux is located in Beirut’s Badaro residential area. Catroux was a general in the French Army (1877-1969), a diplomat who served in World War I and II, and an adviser in the Legion of Honor.

Rue Clemenceau, located in Ras Beirut, is named after the French prime minister Georges Benjamin Clemenceau (1841-1929). He was a statesman, doctor and journalist who was elected twice to head the French government.

His first term was between 1906 and 1909, while his second was during the

critical period 1917-1920 during World War I. One of the leading architects of the Treaty of Versailles, he was nicknamed Father of Victory and the Tiger.



Avenue Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) is the waterfront road of Beirut and named after the most prominent French figure during the World War II. De Gaulle lived in Lebanon for two years (1929-1931) when he was a major in the French army. He went on to serve as president of France.

Rue Verdun is one of the most high-end lively residential streets in Beirut. It has luxury retail stores, beauty and hair salons, and several cafes. In the center of the street is the Lycée Franco-Libanais school. The French St. Joseph School was situated on this street before it moved to a new location outside the capital. Although this street has been renamed after former Prime Minister Rashid Karami following his assassination in 1987, the name Verdun has remained popular.

Rue Verdun was so named in honor of the victims of the Battle of Verdun, which took place during World War I.



Foch Street, or Marshal Ferdinand Foch Street, is in the commercial heart of Beirut. Foch was a supreme Allied general in the World War I. One of Beirut's streets was named after him following the Allies' victory over the Germans.

Monnot Street, located on the eastern side of Beirut's central district, is full of restaurants, bars and libraries. It hosts painters and creative events and holds concerts and plays in its famous theater, which is named after Father Ambroise Monnot, the head of the Jesuit mission to Lebanon in the late 19th century.

Father Monnot contributed to the establishment of schools and printing presses so that Lebanon could become a cultural and intellectual center in the Near East.

Twitter: @najiahoussari



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Greater Lebanon](#)

[French mandate-era landmarks fading from Lebanon's collective memory](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-09-01 00:22

BEIRUT: Lebanon is celebrating its centennial as a modern state with a fading recollection of the landmarks that stood a hundred years ago.

The exception is the Residence des Pins (Pine Residence), the residence of the French ambassador in Beirut, which witnessed the establishment of Greater Lebanon on September 1, 1920 and has remained steadfast against the country's subsequent turmoil.

Other urban markers of that era either became extinct from natural factors and social development or were destroyed during the Lebanese Civil War. Whatever little was preserved perished in the explosion at the Port of Beirut less than a month before Lebanon's centennial.

The houses of Beirut's neighborhoods tell the stories of various epochs. During the first two decades of the 20th century, Beirut was a modest city centered around a tiny natural port, its inhabitants not exceeding 10,000

people.

The city was surrounded by a wall bearing many gates, which closed early each day. The names of these gates – such as Bab Idriss, Asour Gate, and Bab Al-Burj – still resonate, although the walls and gates are no longer standing.

“Beirut did not start to develop until the end of the third decade of the 20th century, when the West began showing an interest in cities on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, including Alexandria, Haifa, Beirut, Mersin and other Ottoman ports that were ready to receive commodities,” said architect Rahif Fayad, 84.

The role of Beirut’s port quickly grew and resulted in the rise of a new mercantile class in the city and Mount Lebanon, Fayad explained.

“The city’s population boomed and had to expand beyond its walls to neighboring areas, which led to it becoming a modern, open city.”

Most buildings during that period were constructed with sandstone excavated from Beirut sand rocks. These old stones can still be seen in Spears Street, the wall of the American University of Beirut, and many of Beirut’s old houses that are still resisting the two forces of modernity and destruction.

The stones were covered with a layer of limestone or cement to protect them from seasonal climatic effects. Houses consisted of one or two floors and were surrounded by a garden, often overlooking the sea, so that family members could live safely, without coming into contact with the surrounding neighborhood.

The facade of these houses consisted of three arches, with a red-sloped brick roof. This style was widespread in Beirut and other coastal cities throughout the eastern Mediterranean and served specific social needs. The inner courtyard was covered with a roof and became known as “Al-Dar” (living room), which was surrounded by bedrooms, a kitchen, and a dining room. This was the typical house of Beirut’s rising mercantile bourgeois class.

The houses were constructed by professionals – designers and construction workers educated in Europe and the US. The architecture was of the finest quality and fit in well with the surrounding environment, as local materials and expertise were used.

Italian architects were hired to design such places as the Sursock Palace, located on the eponymous street bearing the name of this aristocratic family.

With the large number of new arrivals, Beirut expanded and saw its port boom.

In 1920, with the declaration of Greater Lebanon and the beginning of the French Mandate era, colonialists introduced wide streets, modern transportation – such as tramways and cars – and an insatiable, consumerist lifestyle. They tried to fashion public places in the heart of historical Beirut, but some of these collided with the ancient churches and mosques present in the area.

Colonialists also introduced Haussmannian architecture, which entailed dividing the façade of a building into three vertical parts that would be adopted into contiguous buildings, forming the facade of a whole street. This design is best featured in Maarad, Foch, Allenby and Wegan Streets, and other orthogonal streets north of the Beirut Municipality Building.

This design can also be seen in areas relatively distant from the historical heart of Beirut, including Spears, Al-Kantari, May Ziadeh, Gemmayzeh, all the way to the Sursok area in Achrafieh.

“Beirut was the link between East and West, and this is depicted in its architecture since the French Mandate, which introduced new stylistic elements without relinquishing Islamic characteristics,” architect Fadlo Dagher said. “This blend of modern and Islamic elements is best expressed in the architecture of the Beirut Municipality building, which reflects both Ottoman and French architecture.

“This building was designed by the Greek-Lebanese engineer Youssef Aftimus (1866-1952), who began its construction during the Ottoman era and finished it during the French Mandate.”

Beirut’s architectural identity, in Dagher’s words, “reflects the city’s openness to everybody.”

How is it that some palaces and buildings are still standing after 100 years?

“Prior to the Mandate era, Ottoman construction depended on wood to build roofs,” Dagher said. “In 1925, cement was introduced, and brick claddings were replaced with iron, reinforced concrete, or cement.

“During the Ottoman period, balconies were made of marble, but during the Mandate era they were replaced with verandas with three walls, exposed on one side to winds blowing over Beirut. It is pleasant to spend the evening on them.”

As these balconies were roofed, Dagher added, people would be protected from the sun during summer and rain during winter.

“It is noteworthy that terraces were always built on the northern side, in order to not be exposed to the sun,” he said. “They were usually ornamented with oriental and Western designs.”

The Mandate period witnessed a shift from single-family homes to multi-story buildings for commercial investment, Dagher explained.

“With the introduction of cement, buildings became five stories high, with each floor divided into two apartments, while the ground floors were left for shops,” he said. “New social groups came to live in these buildings, adopting the Western economic, social and cultural lifestyle, away from the independent houses surrounded by gardens.”

Lebanon’s independence in 1943 led to the further growth of Beirut. The city adopted modern, vertical architecture and the international style. Later,

this would lead to uneven development, and the “Beirut bourgeois house” would become engulfed by asymmetric iron and cement buildings and towers. Beirut’s ties to the sea withered away.

With the explosion that shook the city on Aug. 4, the Lebanese discovered how fragile and easily damaged their city was. They were also disappointed to discover that the city was not easy to evacuate in case of natural or man-made disasters.

According to a survey by specialized committees, 360 heritage buildings dating back to the period between 1860 and 1930 were partially or fully damaged by the explosion at the port.

“The restoration of these buildings, with their wooden ceilings, renowned decorations, marble balconies and carved windows, primarily requires a political decision to preserve the architectural memory of the city,” Dagher said.

“These are two or three-story buildings and palaces, while the building system in Beirut allows the construction of buildings as high as 13 stories. Many investors are showing interest in buying these damaged, forgotten buildings in order to replace them with tall ones and erase our heritage.”

Twitter: @najiahoussari



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Greater Lebanon](#)

INTERVIEW: Political actors must be transparent, held accountable: ex-Lebanon FM Nassif Hitti

Tue, 2020-09-01 00:42

BEIRUT: Lebanon finally saw the light on Nov. 22, 1945, almost 25 years after the declaration of Greater Lebanon by Gen. Henri Gouraud.

That same year, it became a founding member of the UN. In 1947, one of its most brilliant politicians, Charles Malek, helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, alongside Rene Cassin, Peng Chung Chang, and John Humphrey, under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt's widow, Eleanor.

This golden age has now become a pipe dream in the view of many. The Lebanon of 2020 is nothing less than a failed state, a country that, according to its former Minister of Foreign Affairs Nassif Hitti, "is the least regionally and internationally influential and the most influenced by foreign powers."

In an exclusive interview with Arab News en Francais, Hitti, a diplomat, academic and former minister of foreign affairs and emigrant, said the date of September 1 certainly has a "sentimental" dimension related to "the importance of the creation of this entity" that became the modern Lebanon.

On the other hand, the Greater Lebanon proclamation centenary comes at a time when Lebanon must be prevented from "sinking like the Titanic."

He added: "A confrontation with the current authorities is more than necessary today. You have to show will and foresight. These elements are essential in a country where nearly 52 percent of the population lives below the poverty threshold and where, instead of social uplift, there is now social decline.

"We must have the mindset and go for it. To say that we are a country of coexistence is no longer enough. Today everything is politicized. Structural and comprehensive political, economic, and financial reforms are needed and must be initiated. Time is our sworn enemy."

According to Hitti, a government must be immediately formed, with a plan of action and a roadmap with a clear agenda. "Political actors must be transparent and held accountable."

What about France's role in Lebanon, as French President Emmanuel Macron visits Lebanon for the second time in less than two months? Is not the French intervention mainly driven by the historical link that exists between the two countries?

"There is certainly a sentimental dimension. For Paris, we must save this country, a model of coexistence and of unity in diversity."

However, the strategic importance of Beirut and its stability should not be understated.

“This stability is important, not only for the Middle East, but also for the entire Mediterranean. Lebanon’s deep stability is important for obvious strategic reasons. In case you need reminding, this former head of Lebanese diplomacy (Hitti) resigned as minister of foreign affairs in the wake of an awkward statement made by then Prime Minister Hassan Diab, in response to remarks made by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.”

Le Drian, during a visit to Beirut, had harshly criticized Lebanese officials for their inaction. In response, Diab claimed that Le Drian “lacks information” about the reforms undertaken by his government. Despite the chill cast by this statement, Macron was the first international leader to go to the bedside of Beirut after the massive explosion of Aug. 4 that damaged nearly half of the city.

So, was Paris in a position to prevent Beirut from sinking?

It was, but Hitti said: “We must fulfil our duty. I am very much counting on the role of France. This country is a friend, and a friend is someone who tells you the truth as it is. During my tenure as minister, I was very open to criticism. France can play a supporting role, only if we shoulder our responsibilities.”

How did Hitti perceive Lebanon in 2021? He called for “a new social contract, a drastic reform of the political system, which could put an end to sectarian logic and the reign of tribal leaders.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Greater Lebanon](#)

[Editor's Choice](#)

What a petition for return of French mandate says about LebanonINTERVIEW:
'France is for a strong and sovereign Lebanon'

[Why Franco-Lebanese ties transcend strategic, economic interests](#)

Tue, 2020-09-01 00:10

PARIS: The symbolism could not have been stronger. On Sept. 1, 1920, French Gen. Henri Gouraud, representing the French mandate authority, proclaimed the State of Greater Lebanon from the Pine Residence in Beirut. On that day, Lebanon set out on its path toward independence, which it gained – for better or worse – 23 years later, on Nov. 22, 1943.

One hundred years later, as French President Emmanuel Macron inspected the devastation caused by the massive explosion of Aug. 4, 2020 at the Beirut port, Lebanese people, expressing their anger at the incompetence of the Lebanon's authorities, called for the country to be placed under "French mandate for the coming 10 years."

The French leader promised to return on Sept. 1 for the centenary celebrations of the creation of Lebanon. Meanwhile, Paris stepped up its efforts to support those affected by the explosion, and to urge Lebanese leaders to begin much-needed reforms to deal with the serious economic and financial crisis facing the country.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian's July 8 cri de coeur aimed at the Lebanese authorities – "Help us help you, dammit!" – reflected growing concern in Paris over the very future of Lebanon.

GREATER LEBANON



Relations between the two countries go back much further than the historic date in 1920, which only consecrated ties that were several hundreds of years old. One can trace the beginning of France's links with Lebanon to St. Louis, the 13th-century monarch who recognized the Maronite nation in Mount Lebanon and was committed to ensuring its protection.

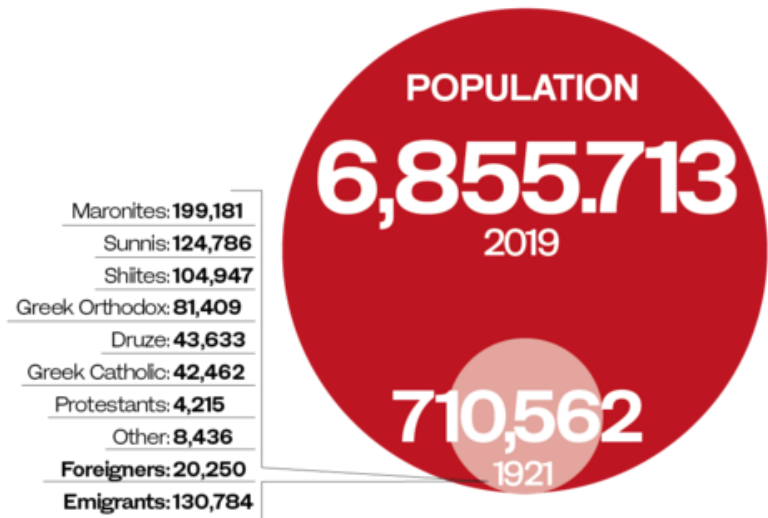
However, it was the capitulation agreements between the Ottoman empire under Suleiman the Magnificent and the European powers, including France, ruled by

Francois I, that paved the way for France in the 14th century to forge deeper relations with the Lebanese, with the aim of defending the empire's minorities, especially Christians.

In 1860, after the massacres of Christians in Mount Lebanon, the French, under Napoleon III, intervened militarily to restore order. This allowed the creation, on a political level, of the Mutasarrifate, an administrative authority that ushered in a period of stability until the First World War.

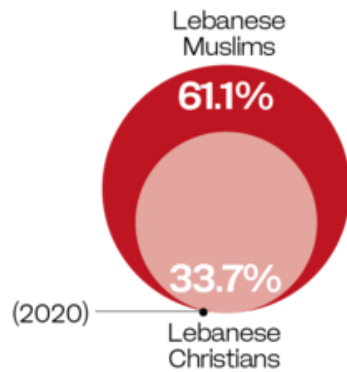
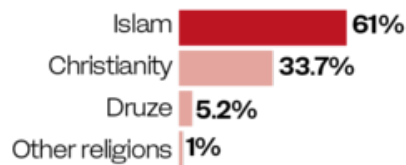
With the end of the Ottoman empire at the beginning of the 20th century, Lebanon was put under French mandate. Since then, Paris has always played a privileged role in the land of the cedars. Beirut was at the center of relations between these two entities, especially its port, which was largely

destroyed in the Aug. 4 blast.



RELIGIONS OF LEBANON

(2017)



SECTS OF ISLAM IN LEBANON

(2020)



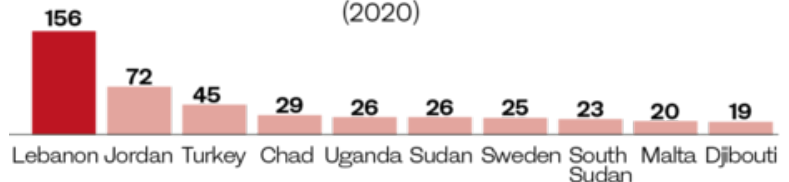
REFUGEES IN LEBANON

(2019)



LEBANON HAS BY FAR THE MOST REFUGEES PER 1,000 POPULATION

(2020)



When the Count of Pertuis was granted the concession for the modernization of the port, he opened Beirut to the world. The city began to develop, mainly thanks to the silk trade between Lyon and the Lebanese mountains. It was the installation of mainly French-speaking religious missions in the 19th century, and the creation of schools and Saint Joseph's University that made Beirut and Mount Lebanon what they are today.

Lebanon thus became the center of a strategic vision for France, which saw it as the flagship of the Beirut-Damascus-Bagdad axis in the face of the British-controlled Haifa-Amman-Bagdad axis.

The establishment by the French of the railway that connected Beirut to Mount Lebanon, on the one hand, and Damascus to Baghdad on the other, ended up giving Beirut a new dimension by shaping it economically, politically and culturally.

France was thus actively present, long before the mandate instituted by the League of Nations in April 1920. The proclamation of Greater Lebanon was the crowning achievement of a relationship that has been established simultaneously on religious, cultural, economic and political levels.



A French patrol, part of a multinational peacekeeping force, outside the southern Lebanese village of Al-Tiri in 2006. (AFP)

France's political support to Lebanon has been immeasurable, especially during the 1975-1990 war. Paris has repeatedly sent envoys to negotiate cease-fires and to unblock political crises. The July 2007 meeting at the Chateau de La Celle-Saint-Cloud to initiate a dialogue between different Lebanese political forces is a case in point.

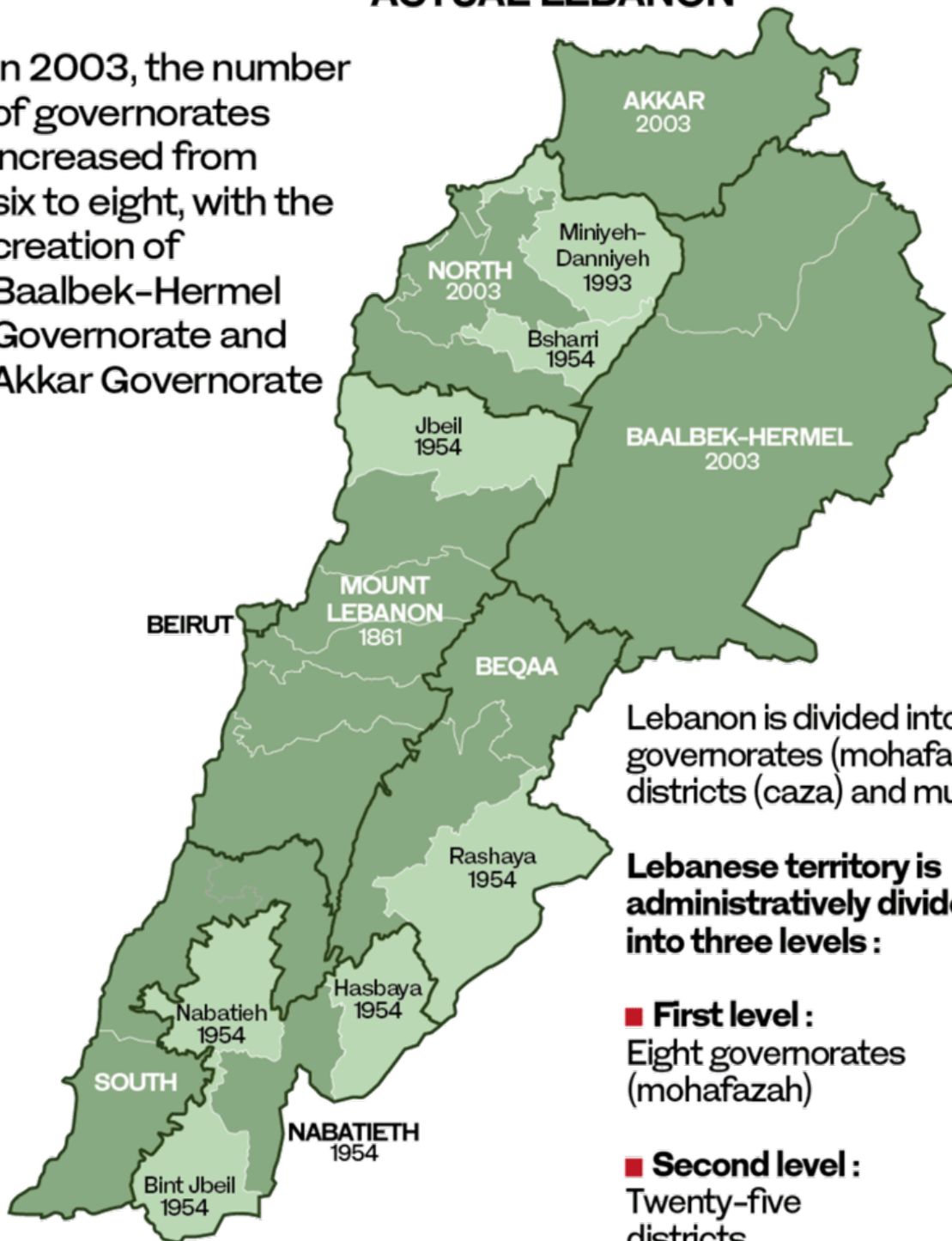
The road map recently presented by President Macron is the latest example of this approach.

France's presence in the UN and multinational forces formed several times to intervene in Lebanon can hardly be glossed over. French soldiers paid dearly for their country's support for Lebanon, such as during the 1983 Drakkar building attack, blamed on Hezbollah and Iran, which killed 58 French paratroopers. The assassination by the Syrians of Ambassador Louis Delamare in 1981 is another case in point.

In addition, France has been present in UNIFIL forces since 1978 and remains one of its principal contributors.

ACTUAL LEBANON

In 2003, the number of governorates increased from six to eight, with the creation of Baalbek-Hermel Governorate and Akkar Governorate



Lebanon is divided into governorates (mohafazah), districts (caza) and municipalities

Lebanese territory is administratively divided into three levels :

- **First level :**
Eight governorates (mohafazah)
- **Second level :**
Twenty-five districts (qada'a, caza)
- **Third level :**
The municipalities (baladia)

SOURCES: CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA) / STATIST / UNHCR / LIBANDATA.ORG

On the financial front, as the linchpin of the support group for Lebanon, France has always been a mobilizing force for donors. In recent years, various conferences had been organized to help Lebanon, notably Paris I, II and III under the leadership of former President Jacques Chirac, as well as

the CEDRE conference in 2018.

It is a friendship that has been marked by Chirac's unwavering support for Lebanon, especially after the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005. France has always been present in the most difficult times to lend a helping hand. It is also the country that has the most leverage as it tries to talk with all parties, while other countries, especially regional ones, take more radical positions.

Paris is virtually the only power that has always worked for the unity, stability and sovereignty of Lebanon. A special friendship connects the two countries beyond strategic and economic interests – a friendship epitomized by President Macron's words in Beirut on Aug. 6: "Because it's you, because it's us."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Greater Lebanon](#)

[Emmanuel Macron](#)

[Beirut](#)

Lebanon can draw strength from life of De Gaulle: Former French minister
Lebanon at 100: The French mandate's mixed blessing