

# What a petition for return of French mandate says about Lebanon

Mon, 2020-08-31 23:55

LONDON: When the League of Nations issued a decree on Aug. 31, 1920 for the creation of Greater Lebanon under a French mandate, the Arab population was reeling from years of despair under Ottoman rule, a famine that had left at least 200,000 dead and the fallout from World War I.

A century after the proclamation of the State of Greater Lebanon, a petition calling for the French mandate (originally called the Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon) to be re-implemented for a period of 10 years has attracted more than 60,000 signatures.

It was launched around the time French President Emmanuel Macron visited Beirut on Aug. 6, two days after 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate stored carelessly in a warehouse at the city's port for several years exploded and damaged large sections of the city. At least 181 people died, more than 6,000 were injured and an estimated 300,000 were left homeless.

The cause of the disaster, according to most citizens, was government negligence and rampant corruption. It coincided with an unprecedented financial crisis and the deadly coronavirus pandemic. It is no surprise that many Lebanese have lost all confidence in the establishment.

"I sadly came to the realization that Lebanon, the way it is now with the government that we have, cannot run any more as an independent country," said Marita Yaghi, a 25-year-old doctor and researcher. "Not because we don't have the capabilities, not because we don't have the people, but because the people who are already in the government are just so attached to their positions.

"The mandate would be there for 10 years, 1,000 per cent temporary, just to be able to help out with the transition to an independent Lebanese-led government."

Adam Ouayda, a 22-year-old student of law at Saint Joseph University in Beirut, said: "If the mandate serves the purpose of guiding essential reforms that will allow the Lebanese state to move toward becoming a more modern state, without creating a form of economic dependency or control over Lebanon, I would be more inclined to support it."

He added that if such a hypothetical arrangement served a strategic or military purpose that exploited Lebanon, he would oppose it.

While many among the younger generation in Lebanon agree with Yaghi about the political elite's determination to cling to the perks of power, not all believe the solution to the problem is a temporary French mandate.



**The time has come to completely rethink the way Lebanon is governed, politically and economically**

**Karim Emile Bitar**, Director of the Institute of Political Science at Saint Joseph University

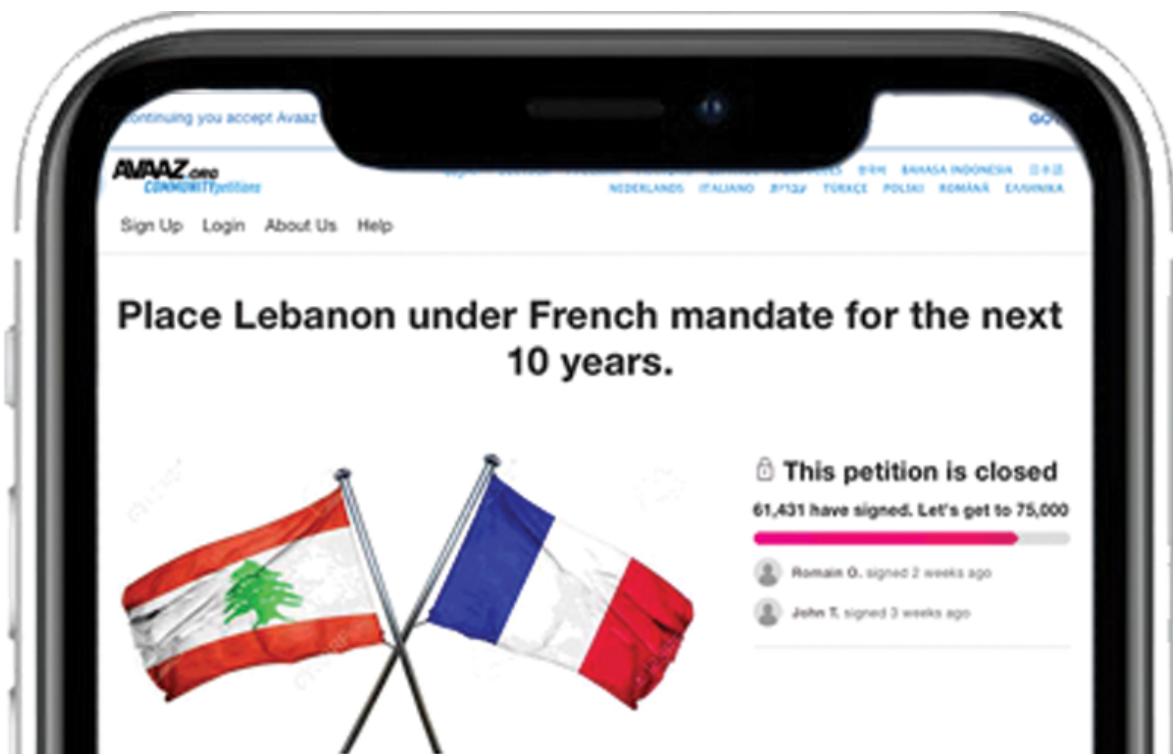
“I do not think colonization in the 21st century should be considered as a valid option because it cancels a lot of the country’s freedoms and, at the end of the day, a mandate is just colonization in disguise,” said Sara Abi Raad, a 25-year-old doctor.

Jeffrey Chalhoub, 22, agreed, saying: “Implementing the French mandate would not necessarily ameliorate Lebanon’s crises, but will add to our inability to govern and develop ourselves free from outside influence.”

Lebanon’s students and youth have been a pivotal part of the nationwide protests that began on Oct. 17 last year, calling for an end to sectarianism and corruption. Decades of government mismanagement and negligence have culminated in the country’s currency losing about 80 percent of its value. A UN World Food Programme survey found that nearly half of Lebanese people questioned are worried they will not have enough to eat.

“I think this petition is merely a sign of despair – the Lebanese populace are so desperate, so angry and so mad at the current political system and at their ruling elites,” said Karim Emile Bitar, director of the Institute of Political Science at Saint Joseph University.

“They are so fed up with the mobsters that have been governing them for the past 30 years, that this idea – which is, frankly, completely ridiculous and unrealistic – began floating around and attracting signatures.”



**The online petition calling for the French mandate to be re-implemented for a period of 10 years has attracted more than 60,000 signatures.**

The explosion on Aug. 4 and its aftermath was a wake-up call for civil-society groups across the country, he added.

“While politicians and the establishment have been completely complacent and inactive since (Macron’s) last visit, it is as if the last visit did not happen, and they have made absolutely no progress in the formation of a new government. In contrast, civil-society groups have been quite actively trying to get their act together. They have been trying to form a wide coalition,” said Bitar, who in 2017 cofounded Kulluna Irada, a civic organization advocating for political reform in Lebanon.

However, the goal of a united front to tackle the ruling elite’s grip on power has proved notoriously elusive, with different factions and civil-society groups refusing to agree or compromise on some points, including social and economic issues, early legislative elections and the disarmament of Hezbollah.

“The mutual demand today, the demand that is agreed upon by most opposition groups, is a temporary government that would have legislative prerogatives,” said Bitar. “This is not something new to Lebanon; between the 1950s and the 1980s, Lebanon had seven governments that had legislative prerogatives, and many people feel that today this would be an absolute necessity to prevent the current political parties from continuing to control what the government does, as they did under the (Prime Minister Hassan) Diab government.”

Diab’s government resigned less than a week after the explosion in Beirut but remains in place in a caretaker capacity. President Michel Aoun announced on Thursday that binding consultations will take place on Monday to decide on a new prime minister, in the run-up to another visit by Macron next week.

Analysts believe the last-minute scrambling is unlikely to bring about any genuine change and that it will be business as usual for the government. That is what happened when Saad Hariri’s cabinet resigned three weeks after the October protests began and was replaced by Diab’s Hezbollah-backed government.

“Today, Lebanon’s entire system needs an overhaul,” said Bitar. “There is a new generation of Lebanese that is demanding radical change, and the time has come to completely rethink the way Lebanon is governed, politically and economically.”

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## Denied permits, Palestinians raze own homes in Jerusalem

Author:

Mon, 2020-08-31 01:41

JERUSALEM: Palestinian Alaa Borqan preferred to tear down his own house in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem after a court ruled that it was constructed illegally and must be demolished.

The 35-year-old was given two options: To destroy his four-bedroom home in the Jabal Mukaber neighborhood himself, or to let the city council do it and then send him the bill.

The Israeli authorities regularly raze homes built by Palestinians on their own lands in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank if they lack Israeli construction permits.

The catch, according to an UN study, is that such permits are "virtually impossible" to obtain and the result is a chronic housing shortage.

"I applied to city hall for a building permit, but without success," Borqan told AFP.

"I spent around 75,000 shekels (\$22,000) on legal fees and on a ground survey," he said.

Ben Avrahami, an adviser to the city authorities on East Jerusalem, said that every case is handled strictly according to the law.

"The demolitions are being carried out by order of an Israeli court and are subject to careful legal scrutiny," he said.

Borqan, a father of four, however said he was dismayed after he hired a bulldozer that tore down his own house in front of his eyes.

He said he had invested all his savings in the building, taking on a debt of 800,000 shekels and putting in four years of work.

The court, which ruled the structure illegal because it was built without a permit, fined him 60,000 shekels for the offense.

He now lives with his family in a house that he rents for 2,800 shekels a month.

Standing in the rubble of his former house, he recounted "how difficult it is to demolish (a home) with one's own hands."

According to city hall, 44 houses have been demolished in East Jerusalem since the start of this year.

Some owners prefer to raze their homes themselves to avoid having to pay sometimes thousands of shekels to the city's demolition crews.

Under Israeli occupation since the 1967 Six-Day War, East Jerusalem is home to around 300,000 Palestinians and 200,000 Jewish settlers.

Palestinians charge that the true purpose of the permit regime is to empty the city of its Palestinian inhabitants. The UN's Office for Humanitarian

Affairs (OCHA) noted in an April 2019 report that in East Jerusalem “a restrictive planning regime applied by Israel makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits.”

“At least one-third of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack an Israeli-issued building permit, potentially placing over 100,000 residents at risk of displacement,” it added.

OCHA says that only 13 percent of east Jerusalem is designated for Palestinian construction, much of which is already built up, while 35 percent has been allocated to Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law.

According to the director of the Jerusalem Center for Economic and Social Rights, Ziad Hammuri, the self-demolitions are “humiliating” and “have considerable psychological effects” on families, in addition to heavy financial costs.

But many Palestinians still prefer to demolish their property themselves, fearing arrest if they are unable to pay the city’s demolition bill or fines. On July 2, the Shalalda family also demolished their home, a two-bedroomed apartment in A-Tur.

It is “very difficult, a dream has been destroyed,” lamented Sara Shalalda, a mother of six.

“We were about to move in, we didn’t want to have to pay rent anymore.”

According to OCHA, 65 children were displaced and 85 others variously affected by self-demolitions in east Jerusalem in the first six months of the year.

Palestinians lack 30,000 to 40,000 housing units, rents are high, and building permits are expensive, said Mahmud Zahaykeh of the Jerusalem Housing Union.

“The average rent is \$800 and a building permit for an apartment can cost \$50,000,” he added.

“Only 20 percent of residents obtain permits, and the process can take five years.”

Avrahami says the city grants around 250 building permits to Palestinians each year.

Borqan had hoped to be among the lucky ones but his hopes were dashed.

“They don’t want us to stay,” he said, referring to Israel.

“But we are not going to move.”



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## [Sudan rebels agree to key peace deal with government](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-08-31 01:36

KHARTOUM: Sudan's main rebel alliance has agreed to a peace deal with the government aimed at ending 17 years of conflict, official news agency SUNA said on Sunday.

The Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), an alliance of rebel groups from the western region of Darfur and the southern states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, inked a peace agreement with the government late on Saturday.

A formal signing ceremony is set to take place on Monday in Juba, the capital of neighboring South Sudan, which has hosted and helped mediate the long-running talks since late 2019.

Senior government officials and rebel leaders "signed their initials on



protocols on security arrangements” and other issues late Saturday, SUNA reported.

However, two key holdout rebel forces have refused to take part in the deal. The final agreement covers key issues around security, land ownership, transitional justice, power sharing, and the return of people who fled their homes due to war.

It also provides for the dismantling of rebel forces and the integration of their fighters into the national army.

Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and several ministers flew to Juba on Sunday, the news agency said, where he met with South Sudan President Salva Kiir.

## **SPEEDREAD**

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Hamdok said that finding a deal had taken longer than first hoped after a initial agreement in September 2019.

“At the Juba declaration in September, everyone expected peace to be signed within two or three months, but ...we realized that the questions were of one great complexity,” Hamdok said.

“However, we were able to accomplish this great work, and this is the start of peace building.”

The rebel forces took up arms against what they said was the economic and political marginalization by the government in Khartoum.

They are largely drawn from non-Arab minority groups that long railed against Arab domination of successive governments in Khartoum, including that of toppled ruler Omar Bashir.

About 300,000 people have been killed in Darfur since rebels took up arms there in 2003, according to the United Nations.

Conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile erupted in 2011, following unresolved issues from bitter fighting there in Sudan’s 1983-2005 civil war.

Forging peace with rebels has been a cornerstone of Sudan’s transitional government, which came to power in the months after Bashir’s overthrow in April 2019 on the back of mass protests against his rule.

Two movements rejected part of the deal – a faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement, led by Abdelwahid Nour, and a wing of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), headed by Abdelaziz Al-Hilu.

Previous peace accords in Sudan, including one signed in Nigeria in 2006 and another signed in Qatar in 2010, have fallen through over the years.



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Sudan to launch mass polio vaccination after outbreak

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## [Coalition forces in Yemen foil Houthi boatbomb attack](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-08-31 00:31

RIYADH: Saudi-led coalition forces in Yemen intercepted and destroyed a remote-controlled boat rigged with explosives in Hodeidah governorate on Sunday, the alliance's joint command said.

In a statement carried by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), the coalition said the bomb-laden boat was launched by the Iran-backed Houthi "terrorist" militia.

The boat was destroyed before it could do any damage, coalition spokesman Col. Turki Al-Maliki said in the statement without giving details.

Al-Maliki said the Houthi militia “is using Hodeidah governorate as a place to launch ballistic missiles, drones, and explosive and remotely piloted boats, as well as the random deployment of marine mines, in a clear and explicit violation of international humanitarian law, as well as a violation of the provisions of the Stockholm ceasefire agreement in Hodeidah.”

Earlier on Sunday, the coalition said Saudi air defense forces shot down an armed drone launched by the Houthis toward Abha airport in southern Saudi Arabia.

Although some shrapnel fell on the airport as the drone was destroyed, no injuries were reported, Al-Maliki said.



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Arab coalition intercepts Houthi drone targeting Saudi Arabia  
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# Lebanon president admits need to 'change the system'

Author:

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Sun, 2020-08-30 19:44

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Sunday acknowledged a need to "change the system" and called for the proclamation of a secular state on the eve of a visit by his French counterpart.

"Lebanon's youth are calling for change," the 85-year-old Aoun said in an address that was interspersed with footage from last year's anti-government protests.

"Yes, there is a need to develop, modify, change the system... Call it the way you like, but Lebanon most definitely needs to be running its affairs in a new way," he added.

Aoun offered few details but called "for the proclamation of Lebanon as a secular state" and a dialogue that could lead to constitutional amendments. The main framework of Lebanon's current mode of governance is the 1989 Taif accords.

They led to the end of the 1975-1990 civil war but have since become a by-word for the kind of sectarian-based politics that many want to get rid of. Aoun's political ally Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah also said in an earlier address he was open to Emmanuel Macron's proposal for a new political pact in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, the country's Sunni political heavyweights agreed on a name to propose as prime minister, a move that Lebanon's protest camp immediately rejected as exactly the opposite of change.

Less than four weeks after visiting Beirut in the aftermath of an explosion at the capital's port that killed more than 180 people and traumatised the nation, Macron was due back on Monday to press his demands for change.

On the eve of Macron's return, Nasrallah also adopted a conciliatory tone. "On his latest visit to Lebanon, we heard a call from the French president for a new political pact in Lebanon... Today we are open to a constructive discussion in this regard," Nasrallah said.

"But we have one condition: this discussion should be carried out... with the will and consent of the various Lebanese factions," he said in a televised speech broadcast a few hours before Aoun's address.

Nasrallah did not say what changes Hezbollah was willing to consider.

Lebanon recognises 18 official religious sects and its 128 parliamentary seats are divided equally between Muslims and Christians.

Governments born out of this system have been prone to deadlock and failed to meet popular demands to improve living conditions.

Macron, the first world leader to visit Lebanon after the Aug. 4 blast, had called for "a revamped pact with the Lebanese people in the coming weeks".

The explosion of a massive stockpile of ammonium nitrate, left to languish for years in a warehouse at Beirut's port, forced the government to resign on

August 10.

Consultations to name a new premier are due to begin on Monday but the top political leaders of the Sunni community, who are entitled to the position under Taif, agreed on one man.

The 48-year-old Mustapha Adib is Lebanon's ambassador in Berlin and a relative unknown on the political scene.

A group of former prime ministers, including top Sunni political figure Saad Hariri, announced they had decided on Adib after reviewing several names. Many Lebanese have blamed the monster blast on a ruling class seen as mired in nepotism and graft since the country's civil war.

The explosion that wounded at least 6,500 people and rendered thousands homeless without any significant government support revived the protest movement that had emerged in October to demand the wholesale removal of the political elite.

It also prompted Washington to press for political change.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker is expected next week in Lebanon, on the second visit by a top American official since the blast.

He will "urge Lebanese leaders to implement reforms that respond to the Lebanese people's desire for transparency, accountability, and a government free of corruption," the State Department said.



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