

# Lebanese trust army – not Hezbollah – to secure stability, poll shows

Author:

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BEIRUT: Eighty-nine percent of respondents in a recent poll said they trusted the Lebanese Armed Forces to ensure the country's stability, while 80 percent felt the same way about the religious leadership and 75 percent about the judiciary.

In contrast, just 19 percent of those polled – regardless of their religious beliefs – thought political parties could be trusted to ensure stability.

On Hezbollah, opinions were divided. The poll, conducted by Zogby Research Services, found that 48 percent of respondents had confidence in it to secure Lebanon's stability, while 52 percent did not.

Almost two-thirds of those polled expressed the belief that the "weapons and forces of the resistance should be under the control of the LAF and this includes a majority of respondents in every sectarian community."

The poll was carried out in September, 10 days after the formation of Najib Mikati's government. The respondents were adults from various Lebanese regions and sects, and all said they were optimistic about the future despite the current situation being worse than it was five years ago.

A total of 869 people were asked their opinions on the economic crisis in Lebanon, how it has affected citizens and how far they trust state institutions. They also gave their views on Lebanon's relations with other countries, the political regime and their hopes for the upcoming legislative elections.

Speaking at an event organized by the AUB Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, also attended by Arab News, James Zogby, who owns the polling company, said: "The developments Lebanon has faced of late led to breaking the existing regime which needs reform, but the ruling political elite does not want to admit that."

Zogby, who is also the founder and president of the Arab American Institute, said the poll showed that respondents had been seriously affected by shortages of fuel (97 percent), electricity (89 percent) and drinking water (74 percent). More than a third of people reported having to go without food on some occasions, with one in five from poor backgrounds saying they or members of their families had "very often gone without meals because of a lack of money or available food."

"Almost two-thirds said they don't have enough income to make ends meet. And when asked to identify the most pressing economic problems facing the country, far and away the two issues they pointed to were the collapse of the

lira (Lebanese pound) and corruption. Given this dire situation, almost two-thirds of all respondents said they would emigrate if given the opportunity," Zogby said.

He added that about 65 percent of respondents thought the "Oct. 17 revolution was beneficial for the country's stability, while 29 percent said parliament does not ensure stability."

Seventy-six percent of respondents under the age of 30 were more confident in the revolution ensuring Lebanon's stability.

When asked whether Lebanon should strengthen or weaken its ties with other countries, only France scored well, with respondents supporting strengthening ties with Paris by a ratio of two to one.

On the US and Iran, a third of people said ties should be strengthened, a third said they should be weakened and a third said they should remain as they were.

Zogby said that respondents, "seemed optimistic of change in the next legislative elections," with almost 60 percent expressing some confidence that they would "bring the political change Lebanon needs."

That attitude may be due to the fact that two-thirds of respondents said they would be voting for the "new alternative parties, with this holding true for all demographic groups. Only one in five said they will vote for the traditional parties."

This rejection extends to the Taif agreement, with almost 60 percent saying Lebanon should dispose of the Taif formula and "adopt a new constitutional model of governance."

The results of the poll – which Dr. Fadlo Khoury, president of the American University of Beirut, said was based on reliable sources, and which was praised by Dr. Joseph Bahout, director of the Issam Fares Center for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB – also raised a number of questions.

Dr. Brigitte Khoury, founding director of the clinical psychology training program at AUH, said: "People need food and health security, in addition to security itself. Every day brings new challenges to the Lebanese, which prevents them from planning for the future or from dreaming of a better future."

She added that after the explosion of the port of Beirut, "people became more desperate and depressed, while the level of tension rose and people lost their power and control, and this is the hardest thing that a human being could face, and it could acquire a violent tendency especially among people who live through shocking events."

Khoury said that if the "elections do not take place then I fear that people will further lose their power and control especially if there is no justice or a sound judiciary."

Dr. Jamil Mouawad, a political scientist, expressed his fear that the “institutions which the Lebanese still trust might be a target for the untrustworthy political powers. We see how the judiciary and the military institutions are getting besieged by the politicians.”

He was skeptical about the “possibility of the next parliamentary elections producing promising changes if the parties in power revert to confessional polarization and to using money.”

The Lebanese “should agree on a political plan to get out of the crisis and this is something that is not clear. And the question that needs an answer is what is the political regime that the Lebanese want, and what are we protesting against?”

Mouawad said that “the ones who participated in the Oct. 17 revolution lack experience and should have history lessons to see what has happened.”



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Lebanese officials busy themselves with border dispute discussions against backdrop of port blast anger US Treasury imposes more sanctions on Hezbollah-linked Lebanese individuals

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## Russia's defense chief arrives in Syria to review naval drills

Author:

Wed, 2022-02-16 00:51

MOSCOW/DAMASCUS: Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu traveled to Syria to inspect naval drills involving 15 warships and 30 aircraft in the eastern Mediterranean on Tuesday, the RIA news agency cited his ministry as saying. The drills are part of a surge of Russian military activity amid a standoff with the West over security in Europe. Russia said earlier it had deployed fighter jets with hypersonic missiles to its Syrian air base for the naval exercises.

Moscow announced on Jan. 20 that its navy would stage an array of exercises involving all its fleets from the Pacific to the Atlantic, drawing on 10,000 servicemen, 140 warships and dozens of planes.

Meanwhile, a bomb attached to a bus carrying Syrian troops in Damascus exploded on Tuesday morning, killing one soldier and wounding 11, state TV reported.

The blast occurred during rush hour at a customs roundabout near the capital's landmark Omayyad Square, according to the report. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Such attacks have occurred in Damascus in recent months amid an otherwise calm period in the capital. Regime forces captured rebel-held eastern neighborhoods of the city in 2018.

Regime forces now control much of Syria with the help of President Bashar Assad's allies Russia and Iran, while rebels are mostly cornered in the country's northwestern province of Idlib. US and Turkish troops, meanwhile, are deployed in parts of the country's north and east.

In October, two bombs attached to a bus carrying Syrian troops exploded in Damascus, killing 14. It was one of the deadliest bombings in the capital in years.

A little-known group calling itself the Qasioun Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack at the time.

In recent years, attacks in Damascus have been rare. One of the last major explosions to take place was in 2017 – when bombers hit a judicial office building and a restaurant, killing nearly 60 people.



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Two women, two children among six killed in Syria regime shelling on Idlib

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## [Israeli premier meets Bahrain crown prince in push to tighten ties](#)

Wed, 2022-02-16 00:37

MANAMA: Israel's prime minister met Bahrain's crown prince on Tuesday as the new allies sought to nurture closer cooperation and present a united front to their shared nemesis Iran.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was making a one-day visit to the Gulf island kingdom, the first by an Israeli leader, less than two years after the countries established formal diplomatic relations as part of the US-brokered "Abraham Accords."

Bennett was greeted by Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, who also serves as the kingdom's prime minister, and a military color guard at Manama's Gudaibiya Palace. He told the crown prince that he came "with a spirit of goodwill, of cooperation, of standing together against mutual challenges."

Bennett also met several government ministers and discussed the need for greater economic cooperation.

"We must do more to get to know one another and build upon the Abraham Accords, which have been such a historic agreement," the crown prince said.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**Israel has stepped up its naval presence in the Red Sea after a series of attacks on commercial ships with links to Israel, which it blamed on Iran.**

In recent months, as tensions with Iran have soared, the two countries have intensified military cooperation.

Early this month, they signed a defense pact, and last week, Bahrain announced that an Israeli naval officer would be stationed in Manama, which is also home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet.

The Israeli military confirmed it will have a naval representative attached to the 5th fleet.

Bennett met with the fleet commander, Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, during his stop in Manama. Bennett's office said the fleet "is a significant element in maintaining regional stability in the face of various security threats."

It did not mention Iran specifically. But Israel has made no secret of its concerns about Iranian naval activities across the region.

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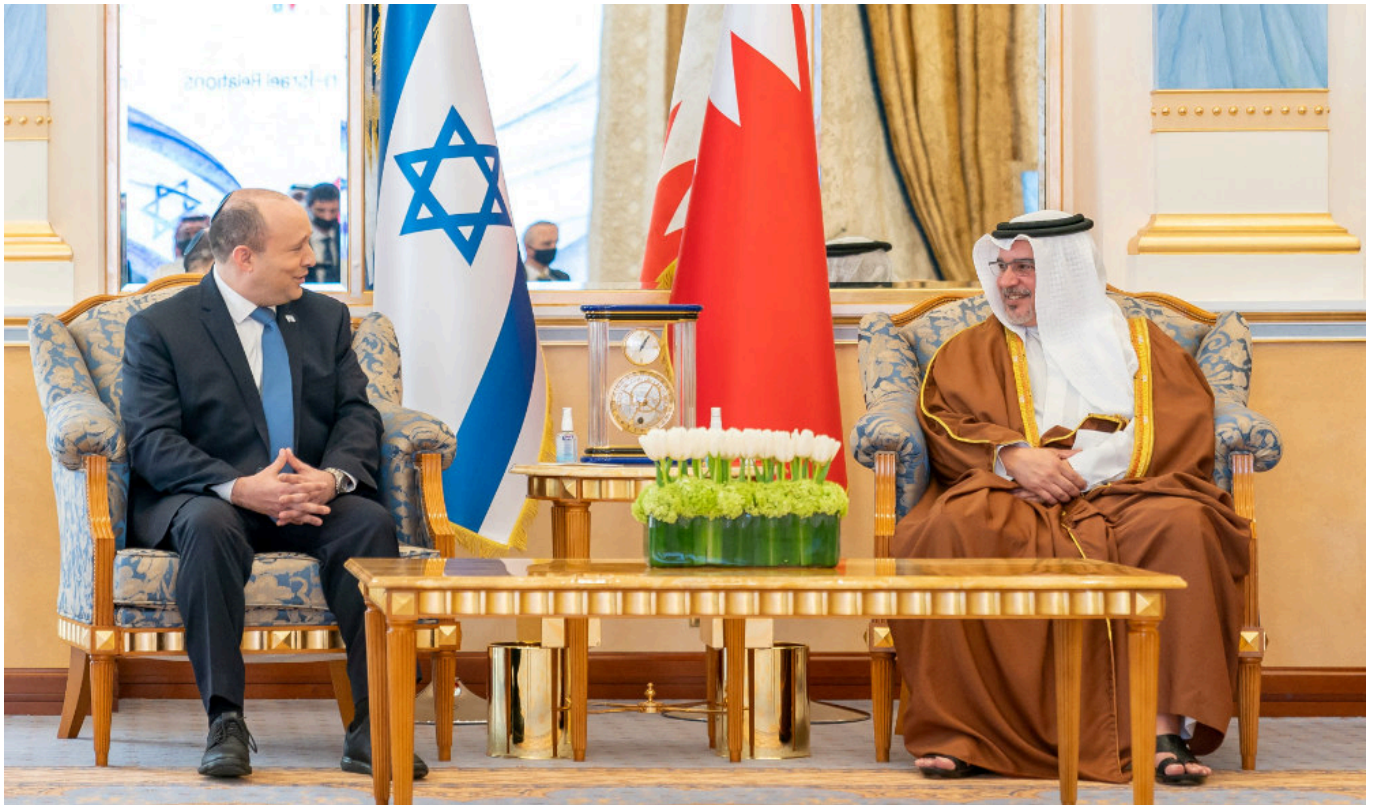
Earlier this month Israeli ships took part in a massive naval exercise in the Gulf. Israeli warships also participated in US-led naval drills with the UAE and Bahrain in the Red Sea in November.

Israel and Bahrain established formal diplomatic ties after years of clandestine security cooperation over their shared enmity of Bahrain's neighbor, Iran.

Israel and Bahrain have exchanged ambassadors and signed trade and defense agreements since they signed a normalization agreement on the White House lawn, alongside the UAE, Sudan and Morocco, in September 2020.

Bennett's visit came as negotiations between world powers and Iran to reach an international agreement to curb Tehran's nuclear program continued in Vienna.

Israel has said it would not be bound by any such agreement and that it would take whatever action necessary, including a military strike, to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear arms.



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## [Over 100 Sudanese detainees, including high-profile politicians, start hunger strike](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-02-16 00:24

KHARTOUM: More than 100 Sudanese detainees, including high-profile politicians, began a hunger strike on Tuesday, allied lawyers and doctors said.

The detainees are part of the protest movement against an Oct. 25 army coup that ended a civilian-military power-sharing arrangement that followed the overthrow of long-ruling autocrat President Omar Bashir in 2019.

The coup prompted mass protests during which 81 people have been killed, most

recently two on Monday, and more than 2,000 injured, according to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors.

“More than 100 unlawful detainees in Soba prison entered today in an open hunger strike due to their unjustified and illegal detention,” the Defense Committee for the Unlawfully Detained and Martyrs of Arbitrary Killings said in a statement.

The group said separately that one suspect in the killing of a police brigadier general had been tortured while another was in solitary confinement.

Civilian politicians Khalid Omer Yousif and Wagdi Salih were taking part in the hunger strike, said Abdelqayom Awad, a member of Yousif’s Sudanese Congress Party.

Along with former Sovereign Council member Mohamed Al-Faki Suleiman who was arrested on Sunday, the men face corruption charges apparently stemming from their work on a taskforce dismantling the network of Bashir.

The Sovereign Council was a body of civilian politicians and military men set up after Bashir’s overthrow to lead a transition to democracy.

It was dissolved after the October coup, setting back those plans.

Military leaders say the coup was necessary due to political infighting and for the country’s security, but they say they are still committed to elections in mid-2023.

Military leader Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan said in an interview on Saturday he was not involved in the arrests of Yousif and Salih – who were also detained temporarily in the coup – but that their work on the committee had diverged from its aims.

On Monday, thousands rallied in the capital Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman, while protests also took place in the eastern city of Port Sudan and in the western Darfur region, according to witnesses.

In Khartoum, protests had begun with crowds waving national flags and carrying red balloons, as the rallies coincided with Valentine’s Day.

“Today is the nation’s love day,” one banner read.

Some shouted slogans demanding the authorities release activists who had been arrested, while others carried pictures of protesters killed.

“We are demanding the release of resistance committee members and politicians who were unjustly arrested, and some of whom are facing fabricated charges,” protester Khaled Mohamed said.

But as crowds tried to approach the presidential palace, security forces fired volleys of tear gas canisters.



One protester was killed after he was shot in “the neck and chest by live rounds by coup forces” in Khartoum, the independent Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said.

Another protester was later killed in Omdurman after being struck by “live bullets to the left shoulder which penetrated the chest,” the committee said.

Sudanese police said in a statement that at least 102 police were “severely wounded” while one suffered “a gunshot to the foot.”

It also noted that protesters have “smashed the front” of the parliament building, set a fire near an adjacent gas station, and damaged several vehicles and a mosque in Omdurman.

Damage was also reported to several parts of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in the city, and items belonging to security guards were looted, it said, adding that police only “exercised the reasonable legitimate force” in response.

The authorities have also arrested scores of activists accused of belonging to the “resistance committees” that have been instrumental in organizing protests.

“The number of people detained arbitrarily and without criminal charges has exceeded 100,” the Sudanese Professionals Association said Monday.

On Sunday, authorities arrested Mohamed Al-Fekki, a civilian former member of the ruling Sovereign Council, which led the country under the now stalled 2019 power-sharing agreement.

Last week, authorities arrested ex-minister Khaled Omar Youssef and Wagdi Saleh, the spokesman of Sudan’s main civilian bloc, the Forces for Freedom and Change.

Those arrests came just a day after they joined an FFC delegation for talks with UN special representative Volker Perthes, as part of efforts to resolve Sudan’s deepening crisis.

The October military power grab, the latest coup in Sudan since its independence, has sparked widespread international condemnation and punitive measures – but authorities have shown little inclination to compromise.



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Ex-Sudan official detained as 2 killed in anti-coup protests Sudan rejects Western criticism of arrests as 'blatant interference'

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## [US officials meet Tunisians civil society members](#)

Wed, 2022-02-16 00:16

TUNIS: US officials have met with Tunisian civil society representatives amid Washington's concern over the dissolution of the Supreme Judicial Council, the US Embassy in Tunisia said on Tuesday, escalating international pressure on President Kais Saied.

Saied last week dissolved the council, one of the remaining institutions in Tunisia that was able to work independently of him, in the latest of a series of moves his opponents have described as being part of a coup.

US Deputy Assistant Secretaries Karen Sasahara and Christopher Le Mon met with Tunisian civil society representatives to discuss recent political and judicial developments, the US Embassy said in a statement.

“We are concerned by Tunisian President Saied’s decree. Last week, we joined like-minded partners in emphasizing that an independent judiciary is a core element of an effective and transparent democracy,” State Department spokesman Ned Price had said a day earlier.

Tunisia’s president cemented his grip over the judiciary on Sunday with a decree that lets him dismiss judges or block their promotion, helping consolidate his power after he seized executive authority last summer.

Saied outraged his opponents and alarmed democratic foreign allies with his announcement about the judicial body.

Saied, meanwhile, relieved the temporary head of national radio, Chokri Cheniti, from his position, the presidency announced in a statement.

Saied had appointed Cheniti as the temporary head of the national radio, Radio Tunisienne, in September. He did not name a replacement for Cheniti.



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