

The Presidency of Joseph Aoun in Lebanon Must Set a New Precedent for the Country

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Brief Analysis

Lebanon's election of Army Chief Joseph Aoun after two years of stagnation and political paralysis heralds the potential for a new and better future for the country.

Politics in Lebanon, long based on a sectarian power-sharing model of governance, had been stunted by the inordinate power wielded by Hezbollah. This party-cum-militia had risen to become the most influential actor in the country, making it too powerful to be regulated by government—until its recent demise.

With this fall comes a new opportunity, and Lebanon now stands at a critical juncture. The cyclical stagnation caused by consensus governments protected by Hezbollah has perpetuated the nation's crises, including an unprecedented economic collapse brought about by an elite of warlords turned corrupt politicians who exploited and mismanaged state resources. This has in turn caused a brain drain and mass exodus of Lebanon's finest—presently known as the Lebanese diaspora—who are now estimated to be a majority of the global population of Lebanese.

The aspirations of the international community, and more importantly the Lebanese diaspora, hinge on Lebanon's incoming president and soon-to-be-formed government's ability to chart a new course—one that is premised on national unity, inclusiveness, and a commitment to reform. The Lebanese diaspora, estimated at **15.4** (<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1296211/amp>) million in 2018, has tirelessly supported the nation through substantial remittances—reaching **\$6.7** (<https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1419163/lebanon-received-67-billion-in-remittances-in-2023-world-bank.html>) billion in 2023 and potentially even more in 2024—while consistently advocating for meaningful change. This dedicated community holds a profound longing for Lebanon to fulfill its vast potential. Failing to meet these aspirations at this moment risks alienating the very people who have been the country's lifeline during its most challenging times.

Lebanon is presently facing a severe humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of a devastating fourteen-month conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. Mass destruction and displacement are likely to have a devastating impact on an

economy already undergoing currency, debt, and banking crises and in dire need of recovery. The World Bank has estimated the cost of physical damages and economic losses at **\$8.5 billion** ([https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-saudi-arabia-foreign-minister-visit-72ff53886954f6dd6b26d9e9c7ca611e](https://url.emailprotection.link/?bTgbNYYRcS3Awqp79_uQ-e9-SYVdmmxhrI76-Q94DvvRNH6xqphTIARlqhJfnJ_DFWZVJELi26VRAnLBusV-K7w84-gQxgFuzQwArzuWqGRA4h4zwZACJvJ0t-RZr34PFlos90HJxSORBzvSeoSYeJ6xgWM7hfhHbeMOqN2zZCFvruWzXKG6JEo75bWjgB9-KpZURbK2nsOHUJpTOLJTWSQ~~) and counting—with no clear source for this needed relief and reconstruction funding. Considering the government’s track record of poor governance and pervasive corruption, alongside a culture of impunity that remains the hallmark of the state, international donors are understandably skeptical and looking for signs of concrete change. Nevertheless, there are early signs of renewed regional support (<a href=)) for the new government and EU financial backing for the **Lebanese Armed Forces** (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/01/21/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-the-third-assistance-measure-in-support-of-the-lebanese-armed-forces/>), momentum on which the new government can capitalize if it is able to demonstrate an effective crackdown on corruption that has siphoned off past support for the country.

Today, one also needs to address widespread public anger over past mismanagement, corruption, and economic deterioration. In 2024, an Arab Barometer **survey** (<https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/AB8-Lebanon-Country-Report-EN.pdf>) revealed that Lebanon remains at the bottom of rankings in terms of measured Lebanese attitudes towards the state, with the lowest average trust in government. A leadership change is therefore imperative—especially at this juncture of government formation—and there can no longer be room for bazaar-style compromises that trade reform for short-term political gains or narrow sectarian interests. Any return to such deals would not only perpetuate the status quo but also further entrench the public's disillusionment with the political class.

In this context, newly elected President Joseph Aoun has the opportunity to break the vicious cycle of corruption and ineffective governance and convince both international parties and Lebanese worldwide of the country’s ability to forge a new path. The stakes are too high for the Lebanese people and the nation’s future to do otherwise, and the international community should demand no less. President Aoun’s tenure—and the premiership of Judge Nawaf Salam if he is able to form a government—can be defined by a departure from fragile balancing acts and a firm commitment to accountability, transparency, and the rule of law. His ability to mobilize political will, reassert the state’s monopoly over arms and control over the whole territory, and challenge entrenched interests will be the litmus test for Lebanon's recovery.

One of the most crucial reforms anticipated from the government is ensuring the independence of the judiciary, an urgent pivot to E-government, followed closely by the restructuring of the banking sector with the guidance and assistance of the World Bank. Achieving the latter is urgent to reboot the economy, although it will be particularly challenging due to deeply entrenched interests and, even more importantly, the sacrifices in political capital it requires.

Additionally, the government’s ability to properly develop a strategy to demobilize Hezbollah fighters, retire the group’s fighting force and dismantle its arsenal—especially as part of a negotiated, new national defense strategy and in accordance with UN Resolution 1701 that is at the heart of the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire—can help reinforce stability in Lebanon and isolate Hezbollah’s political influence.

Pursuing such reforms requires assembling a government of capable, reform-driven new leaders who push beyond the constraints of Lebanon’s extant sectarian quotas to become empowered to deliver meaningful change: specifically, to jointly commit to an inclusive agenda that espouses a Lebanon for all Lebanese, regardless of

communitarian sense of belonging. Such a government must have broad women participation and should include many from the new generation. Both the President and Prime Minister elect should also tap the vast brain trust of the Lebanese diaspora to surround themselves with an advisory board that they can lean on for guidance. This will be one of the first signs that Lebanese politics is finally shifting away from the status quo.

The world and the Lebanese people are now watching for the next steps on these key pillars of governmental reform, and history will judge harshly any leadership that squanders this opportunity. For Lebanon to rise, it needs bold action that restores trust, revives hope, and sets a precedent for future governance. The time for symbolic gestures and empty promises is long past; it is a moment for transformative, new leadership that can realign the country's trajectory and fulfill the dreams of its people, at home and abroad. ❖

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