

# Lebanon's Mikati says he still faces big hurdles to forming cabinet

Fri, 2021-08-27 20:52

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati said on Friday he still had to overcome major hurdles to forming a new government, amid a deep economic and political crisis that has left the country with a caretaker administration for a year.

Mikati, the third person picked to try to form a government since last year, told television network Al Hadath that the situation in Lebanon remained grave.

Forming a government is a necessary first step to secure international support to help pull Lebanon out of its deepest crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war. The currency has collapsed, while medicines and fuel are running out.

Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, a heavily armed Shi'ite movement back by Iran and under US sanctions, has said Iranian fuel shipments were on their way to help ease shortages.

## Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Asked about Nasrallah's comments, Mikati said he was against anything that would harm Lebanon's interests.

"We will not let anyone lead us to new sanctions," he said. "But I tell the critics and the Arab League give us a candle, we can't say no to the shipment without having an alternative."

The prime minister's post is held by a Sunni according to Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system.

Lebanon has been run by the caretaker government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who resigned with his cabinet after a massive Beirut port blast ripped through the capital a year ago.



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## [Lebanese parliament tells judge he can't subpoena PM Diab](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1630069437002404500

Fri, 2021-08-27 12:23

BEIRUT: The Lebanese parliament on Friday told the judge who is investigating last year's Beirut port explosion that he had exceeded his powers by issuing a subpoena for caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab after he failed to show up for questioning.

Judge Tarek Bitar, leading the inquiry into the huge explosion, issued requests in July to question Diab and other top officials, including former ministers, who were charged by his predecessor with negligence over the

blast.

All have denied any wrongdoing.

In a letter to the prosecutor, the secretary general of parliament said the subpoena fell outside Bitar's jurisdiction.

The explosion on Aug. 4, 2020 was caused by a massive quantity of ammonium nitrate left unsafely at the port for years. It killed more than 200 people, injured thousands and devastated swathes of capital.

Many people in Lebanon are furious that no senior officials have been brought to account.

The inquiry has repeatedly stalled, with the first lead judge removed in February after a court granted the request of two of the former ministers he had charged with negligence for the disaster.

Influential factions have accused Bitar of bias. The powerful Shiite group Hezbollah this month accused him of playing politics.

Sunni politicians, including former Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, have objected to the investigator's moves against Diab, saying the post of prime minister – reserved for a Sunni in the Lebanese sectarian system – has been singled out.

In a statement late on Thursday, former prime ministers including Hariri said President Michel Aoun, the Maronite Christian head of state, had known about the chemicals at the port and said he had done nothing effective to avoid the blast.

They said immunity should be lifted from Aoun, saying the investigation was being directed from the presidential palace.

Aoun responded on Friday saying the accusations in the statement were unfortunate, especially given that he had already said in July he was willing to testify.

Bitar has not commented on accusations that he is pursuing a political agenda.

After the blast, Aoun said he had been informed about the chemicals and directed the Supreme Defense Council, an umbrella group of security and military agencies chaired by the president, to "do what is necessary." He has denied responsibility.

Some MPs have been pressing for the probe into senior officials to be referred to a special council that hears cases against former presidents and ministers. Critics fear this will effectively derail the judicial inquiry.



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Beirut blast judge issues subpoena for PM Diab after no-show Lebanon's PM Diab warns country is a few days away from social explosion

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## [Erdogan weighing risks of Kabul airport deployment amid Turkey-Taliban talks](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1630051707041019900

Fri, 2021-08-27 07:47

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that Ankara had not made a final decision on a Taliban request for support to run Kabul airport after foreign forces withdraw, citing security concerns and

uncertainty in Afghanistan.

However, he added that talks were still underway with the militant group.

"We have held our first talks with the Taliban, which lasted for three and a half hours. If necessary, we will hold similar talks again.

"The Taliban have made a request regarding the operation of Kabul airport. They say, 'we'll ensure security and you can operate it.' But we have not made a decision yet because there is always a possibility of death and such things there," Erdogan told a news conference in Istanbul before leaving for Bosnia.

The president said that "calm should be restored in Kabul" before a decision was made on the airport.

He added that there was a risk of getting "sucked in" to security flare-ups and subsequent conflict.

The talks were reportedly held at the military zone of the airport where the Turkish embassy is temporarily based.

## Opinion

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Erdogan's comments came as US forces helping to evacuate Afghans braced for more attacks while racing to complete their mission before the Aug. 31 deadline set by US President Joe Biden.

At least 13 US military personnel and more than 60 Afghans died in Daesh attacks around Kabul airport on Thursday.

The civilian section of the airport has been on the US agenda as well.

"A functioning state, a functioning economy, a government that has some semblance of a relationship with the rest of the world, needs a functioning commercial airport," State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

Hande Firat, a pro-government journalist, said that a private Turkish company or Turkish Airlines, Turkey's national flag carrier, might operate the Kabul airport if the necessary security precautions are taken.

Firat added that Turkey requested the establishment of a special security system backed by a private security company, rather than rely solely on armed Taliban members.

Many analysts said that if Turkey assumes the responsibility of running the airport, it could present a unique opportunity for Ankara to build leverage over the Western community as a fellow NATO ally.

"Thursday's attacks, as well as the uncertainty looming over the Taliban's consolidation of power, show that Turkey might enter a risky and highly volatile security environment," Magdalena Kirchner, director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation office in Kabul, told Arab News.

According to Kirchner, without Turkish or allied troops on the ground – or a fully operating embassy – Ankara would have to rely on Taliban forces for the protection of Turkish citizens and private companies.

"With key state institutions like the police and other security forces undergoing major changes, Turkey might find it hard to rely on Afghan intelligence agencies or security. Beyond arrangements with the Taliban, Ankara might also resort to private military contractors," she told Arab News.

Turkey has about 600 troops in Afghanistan. Last month, the Taliban issued a warning that it would consider all Turkish forces as "occupiers."

Marc Pierini, an analyst at Carnegie Europe, said that the devastating bombings on Thursday proved that providing security near the airport is "extremely difficult," despite assurances by the Taliban.

"If Turkey was to take charge of security inside the airport, it would be entirely dependent on the Taliban's security policy and performance outside the airport's perimeter. And it would operate without other NATO forces around. At this point in time, such an operation looks like a very risky proposition," he told Arab News.

The deployment of troops at Kabul airport has been the subject of intense talks between Ankara and Washington over recent months, with some financial, logistical and diplomatic conditions attached.

Kirchner said that cooperation at Kabul airport could serve as a test for "normalizing" relations between Western states and the Taliban.

"The airport continues to be the major hub for any humanitarian, diplomatic or development efforts by the Taliban to overcome sanctions and their international isolation. It also helps the international community assist Afghan communities in need, provide consular support to citizens in the country and, if possible, support Afghanistan's social and economic development," she said.

Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based expert on Middle East politics, said: "The negotiations between Erdogan and his US counterpart Joe Biden concentrated on running the military section of the airport, through which humanitarian assistance would be channeled to the country," he told Arab News.

He added that running the civilian part of the airport would be a "simple commercial operation."

Sezer said: "The Taliban are reportedly conducting talks with Russia for the same mission. So, it is unclear for now who will assume this responsibility. One thing is for sure: These talks will be used for domestic popularity



purposes.”



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Erdogan says Turkey can run Kabul airport if US meets conditions  
Daesh attack on Kabul airport kills 60 Afghans, 12 US troops

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## [New group of rebels quits Syria's Daraa under truce](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1630002761977432000

Thu, 2021-08-26 21:38

BEIRUT: A second group of rebel fighters left the southern Syrian city of

Daraa Thursday under a Russian-brokered truce aimed at ending the region's worst fighting in years, a monitor said.

Daraa, seen as the birthplace of Syria's uprising in 2011 and held for years by opposition forces, was returned to government control in 2018 under a previous Moscow-backed ceasefire that had allowed rebels to stay in some areas of Daraa province.

But since late July local armed groups have exchanged artillery fire with government forces and the regime has imposed a crippling siege on the city's southern districts of Daraa al-Balad, seen as a hub for former rebels.

The clashes were the biggest challenge yet to the 2018 ceasefire, and Moscow-led talks have intensified in recent days as the government has stepped up its campaign to root out remaining rebels from Daraa al-Balad.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported Thursday that 53 people, mostly "fighters who rejected the reconciliation deal reached under Russian auspices", had been sent to northern Syria.

Syria's official SANA news agency said that "45 terrorists and some of their family members" had left Daraa in what it called a step "towards ending terrorist control over the district and towards the return of all state institutions and services".

It came two days after an initial group of opposition fighters boarded buses to take them to rebel-held territory in the north, according to the Britain-based Observatory.

It says the agreement would see around 100 rebel fighters leave Daraa al-Balad for northern Syria, with remaining fighters surrendering their arms, in exchange for a lifting of the siege which has seen some 40,000 people face water and power cuts as well as food and medical shortages.

The United Nations said Tuesday that the latest escalation had forced some 38,000 people to flee over the past month.

UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen called Tuesday for humanitarian assistance and an immediate truce.

"Immediate, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access is needed to all affected areas and communities, including Daraa al-Balad," he told the Security Council.





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Fighting in Syria's Daraa displaces 38,000 UN's Syria envoy calls for immediate end to 'alarming' Daraa fighting

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## [U.N. chief calls on Lebanon leaders to form effective government](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1629994203876451800

Thu, 2021-08-26 19:13

UNITED NATIONS: U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed deep concern on Thursday about the deteriorating socio-economic situation in Lebanon and called on all "political leaders to urgently form an effective government of national unity," his spokesman said.

This is needed to “bring immediate relief, justice and accountability ... and drive an ambitious and meaningful course for reform to restore access to basic services, restore stability, promote sustainable development and inspire hope for a better future,” U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. A two-year-long financial meltdown hit a crunch point in Lebanon this month as fuel shortages paralysed much of the country, sparking chaos and numerous security incidents.

The crisis has sunk the currency by more than 90%, forced more than half of Lebanese into poverty and frozen depositors out of their accounts. The World Bank has called it one of the sharpest depressions in modern times.



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Lebanon raids discover hoarded fuel, medicine and baby formula