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Sunni Leader Is Named Prime Minister in Lebanon

By HANIA MOURTADA

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Tammam Salam, scion of a prominent political family, was officially named the new prime minister of Lebanon on Saturday after receiving a string of endorsements from the country’s warring factions over the past few days.

Mr. Salam, 68, was named to the post by the Lebanese president after he garnered 124 of the 128 votes in Parliament. A Sunni whose father, Saeb Salam, served six times as prime minister between 1952 and 1973, Mr. Salam will head a new government that many hope will overcome a dangerous political stalemate that last month led to the [resignation of his predecessor](#).

Lebanon’s government is based on a delicate sectarian system, in place since the end of the civil war in 1990, that is meant to balance power among the country’s multiple sects. The formula requires that the president be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the Parliament speaker a Shiite Muslim.

Eager to present himself as an independent, Mr. Salam emphasized at a news conference on Saturday that he would not bow to pressure from any group and intended to establish a national unity government made up of technocrats.

Mr. Salam appeared optimistic, saying, “The consensus around my nomination is the biggest proof of the intention of political forces to save the country.”

A political impasse last month led to the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati, leaving a power vacuum in a country already in a state of heightened tension over the war in neighboring Syria, which has spilled into northern Lebanon and has left the country struggling to absorb a wave of refugees.

The Syrian conflict also plays into Lebanon’s sectarian divide. The Lebanese Shiite Muslim party Hezbollah supports the government of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, while Sunni rivals back the Sunni-led Syrian insurgency.

Mr. Mikati announced his resignation on March 22, after Parliament failed to agree on rules to govern parliamentary elections

set for later this year. Advisers said at the time that his resignation was also meant to protest the cabinet's refusal to extend the tenure of the national police chief, viewed by many Sunnis as their only remaining protector in the country's deeply politicized security forces.

Hezbollah's adversaries blamed it for Mr. Mikati's departure and accused it of behind-the-scenes diplomatic maneuvering. Rumors abounded that, fearing the imminent fall of the Syrian government, Hezbollah was rushing to install its own supporters in the Lebanese government to strengthen its control.

But in a surprisingly conciliatory move, the Hezbollah-led March 8 coalition threw its weight behind Mr. Salam, a man often described by Syrian activists as sympathetic to the Syrian uprising.

Having managed to secure endorsement from both the anti-Assad and the pro-Assad factions across the political spectrum, Mr. Salam now faces the overwhelming task of forming a cabinet in a fractious political environment where rival political blocs consistently fail to agree on contentious issues.

Mr. Salam's family is one of Lebanon's most influential. His grandfather was a deputy in the Ottoman Parliament and a nationalist figure during the French colonial mandate, and his father, a prime minister known as a staunch Arab nationalist, is remembered for saying, "One Lebanon, not two."

The younger Mr. Salam is himself a seasoned politician, known for having taken a stand against Syrian meddling in Lebanese affairs, most notably when he abstained from running in the 1992 parliamentary elections to protest Syrian hegemony. He ran again in 1996 and won. Following the withdrawal of the Syrian Army from Lebanon in 2005, Mr. Salam served as minister of culture in the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and successfully ran in parliamentary elections in 2009 as a candidate of the Future movement.

In 1982, Mr. Salam served as president of Al Makassed, a philanthropic Islamic association in Beirut, inheriting the position previously held by his father and, before that, his grandfather.