

Lebanon at Crossroads Of Containment and Crisis

By: [Nassif Hitti for Al-Monitor Lebanon Pulse](#). Posted on [April 7](#).

Prime Minister Najib Mikati's resignation reminds us that certain regional critical junctures or political crises in Lebanon could immediately turn into a national one.

About This Article

Summary :

Nassif Hitti asks whether Lebanon has learned from its history or if it will invest itself into yet another destructive and difficult crisis.

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The settlement, or the containment, of a major [Lebanese crisis](#) has always been done through an external understanding among key foreign powers brokering a fragile, even temporary, reconciliation between their Lebanese allies or “clients.”

The latter is a major lesson in Lebanese politics. Lebanese are tremendously divided, to the extent of going to war over external issues and alliances.

Good examples of that phenomenon were the policy vis-a-vis the Egyptian regional leadership of Nasser in 1958, the Palestinian revolution in 1975 and the [Syrian crisis](#) in 2011. Most of the time, the differences among the Lebanese are defined as identity issues with a persistent sectarian polarization.

Indeed, differences leading to major Lebanese national crises are more driven over external issues than internal ones. Nevertheless, former divisions are reformulated and presented as Lebanese domestic issues.

The American-Egyptian understanding put an end to the civil war in Lebanon in 1958 and brought to power the commander in chief of the army, Gen. Fouad Chehab. The Ryad understanding, later confirmed and legitimized by the Arab League in Cairo in 1976, led to the deployment of the Arab deterrence force which later turned into a Syrian force. The 1989 Taif Agreement brought an end to the civil war in Lebanon. These are three examples of

what preceded.

Meanwhile, the increasing [sectarianism in Lebanon](#), fed by the Syrian crisis, is provoking a major problem over which legislative law to adopt before the coming elections in June. To a certain extent, it reshuffled the cards of the political alliances.

Yet, there is a shared fear among the influential external actors, on both sides of the Syrian equation, about the devastating impact of a potential institutional paralysis and state power vacuum in Lebanon. It could drastically affect their interests in light of the chaos in Syria today and the Lebanese uncertainty of tomorrow, despite some internal resistance here and there to form a new government.

This is to be followed by whatever possible agreement on a consensual legislative law to avoid such dangerous paralysis open to the unknown.

Once more, Lebanon is at a crossroads. Will the key opposition forces at home bite the bullet and accept to co-manage a very difficult period of wait and see regarding Syria by avoiding that kind of vacuum and the unknown it embodies, creating a minimal understanding with their external allies — an understanding to avoid a political confrontation that could turn into uncontrolled violence and more destructive tension, with unknown results at home. Or, will they forget the costly lessons of the past, but this time at a much higher price due to the significantly dangerous environment?

The coming weeks will tell which road will be taken.

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