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Andre Vltchek

Lebanon – Now It Is Being Forced to Collapse

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<http://www.globalresearch.ca/lebanon-now-it-is-being-forced-to-collapse/5519384>

Lebanon cannot stand on its feet, anymore. It is overwhelmed, frightened and broke.

It stands on the frontline, facing the ISIS in the east and north, a hostile Israel in the south and the deep blue sea to the west. 1.5 million (mostly Syrian) refugees are dispersed all over its tiny territory. Its economy is collapsing and infrastructure crumbling. The ISIS is right at the border with Syria, literally next door, or even with one foot inside Lebanon, periodically invading, and setting up countless “dormant cells” in all Lebanese cities and all over its countryside. Hezbollah is fighting the ISIS, but the West and Saudi Arabia apparently consider Hezbollah, not the ISIS, to be the major menace to their geopolitical interests. The Lebanese army is relatively well-trained but badly armed, and like the entire country, it is notoriously cash-strapped.

These days, on the streets of Beirut, one can often hear: “Just a little bit more; one more push, and the entire country will collapse, go up in smoke.”

Is this what the West and its regional allies really want?

Top foreign dignitaries, one after another, are now paying visits to Lebanon: the U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon, World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim and the EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini. All the foreign visitors are predictably and abstractly expressing “deep concern” about the proximity of the ISIS, and about the fate of the 1.5 million Syrian refugees now living in the Lebanese territory. “The war in the neighboring Syria is having deep impact on tiny Lebanon”, they all admit.

Who triggered this war is never addressed.



Image: Beirut now

And not much gets resolved. Only very few concrete promises are being made. And what is promised is not being delivered.

One of my sources that attended the closed-door meeting of Ban Ki-moon, Jim Yong Kim and the heads of the U.N. agencies in Beirut, commented: “almost nothing new, concrete or inspiring was discussed there.”

The so-called international community is showing very little desire to rescue Lebanon from its deep and ongoing crises. In fact, several countries and organizations are constantly at Lebanon’s throat, accusing it of ‘human rights violations’ and of having a weak and ineffective government. What seems to irritate them the most though, is that Hezbollah (an organization that is placed by many Western countries and their allies in the Arab world on the “terrorist list”) is at least to some extent allowed to participate in running the country.

But Hezbollah appears to be the only military force capable of effectively fighting against the ISIS – in the northeast of the country, on the border with Syria, and elsewhere. It is also the only organization providing a reliable social safety-net to those hundreds of thousands of poor Lebanese citizens. In this nation deeply divided along the sectarian lines, it extends its hand to the ‘others’, forging coalitions with both Muslim and Christian parties and movements.

Why so much fuss over Hezbollah?

It is because it is predominantly Shi'a, and Shi'a Muslims are being antagonized and targeted by almost all the West's allies in the Arab world. Targeted and sometimes even directly liquidated.

Hezbollah is seen as the right hand of Iran, and Iran is Shi'a, it stands against Western imperialism determinedly, alongside Russia, China and much of Latin America – countries that are demonized and provoked by the Empire and its 'client' states.

Hezbollah is closely allied with both Iran and with the Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria. It combats Israel whenever Israel invades Lebanon, and it wins most of the battles that it is forced to fight. It is openly hostile towards the expansionist policies of the West, Israel and Saudi Arabia; its leaders are extremely outspoken.

“So what?” many people in the region would ask, including those living in Lebanon.



Image: Lebanese army ready to defend Tripoli

Angie Tibbs is the owner and senior editor of Dissident Voice who has been closely watching events in the Middle East for the last number of years. She believes that a brief comparison between events of 2005 and today is essential for understanding the complexity of the situation:

“In a country where, since the end of civil wars in 1990, outward civility masks a still seething underbelly wherein old wounds, old wrongs, real and imagined, have not been forgotten or forgiven, the military and political success of Hezbollah has been the most stabilizing influence. Back in 2005, following the bomb explosion that killed former Premier Rafic al Hariri and 20 others, the US and Israel proclaimed loudly that “Syria did it” without producing a shred of evidence. The Syrian army, in Lebanon at the request of the Lebanese government, was ordered out by the US, and UN Resolution 1559 stated in part that all Lebanese militias must be disarmed. The plan was clear. With Syrian forces gone, and an unarmed Hezbollah, we had two moves which would leave Lebanon's southern border completely vulnerable, and then — well, what would prevent Israel from barging in and taking over?”

Ms Tibbs is also convinced that the so-called international community is leaving Lebanon defenseless on purpose:

“A similar devious scenario is unfolding today. Hezbollah is busy fighting ISIS in Syria; the Lebanese army, though well trained, is poorly armed. Arms deals are being cancelled, the UN and IMF, and, in fact, the world community of nations are not providing any assistance, and little Lebanon is gasping under the weight of a million plus Syrian refugees. It’s a perfect opportunity for ISIS, the proxy army of Israel and the west, to move in and Lebanon’s sovereignty be damned.”

Indignant, several Lebanese leaders are snapping back. The Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil even refused to meet with Ban Ki-moon during his two-day visit of Beirut and the Bekaa Valley.

One of Lebanon’s major newspapers, the Daily Star, reported on March 26th, 2016:

“Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil Saturday accused the international community of approaching the Syrian refugee crisis with a double standard; hours after U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon departed Beirut following a two-day visit.

“They create war, and then call on others to host refugees in line with human rights treaties,” he said in a televised news conference from his residence in Batroun.”

Lebanon is Collapsing

Lebanon is collapsing. Even its once lavish capital Beirut is experiencing constant blackouts, water shortages and garbage-collection dramas. Economically, the country is in a sharp decline.



Image: Once lavish downtown of Beirut – now ready for war

Dr. Salim Chahine, Professor of Finance, at the American University of Beirut, is usually at least moderately upbeat about his country. Developments of recent years, however, wear off his optimism.

“Although the Coincident Indicator issued by the Lebanese Central Bank, BDL, has recently suggested a slight enhancement in economic activity, several officials are sending clear warnings about further deterioration of the situation. The regional geopolitical tensions, the civil conflict in Syria, as well as their implications internally have impacted tourism, trade, and the real estate

sectors. According to HSBC, deposits from Lebanon's largest expatriate population – that usually provide the necessary liquidity for government's borrowing – may grow at a slower rate in the near future given the worsening conditions in the Gulf. As the country enters in its sixth year of economic slump, HSBC remains skeptical about a short-term recovery. The public deficit is currently rising by around 20% per year, and the GDP growth rate is close to zero."

Yayoi Segi, an educationalist and the Senior Program Specialist for UNESCO's Arab Regional Office based in Beirut, works extensively in both Syria and Lebanon. The education sector is, according to her, struggling:

"The public education sector is very small in terms of its coverage in the country, reaching only about 35 percent of the school age population. The state allocation to education is less than 10 percent while the world average or benchmark is 18-20 percent. The situation is further compounded by the currently ongoing crisis in the region whereby Lebanon has had to accommodate a large influx of refugees. The public provision of education has expanded and continues to expand. However, it is impacting on quality and contributes to an increasing number of vulnerable Lebanese students dropping out of school, while it can only reach 50 percent of Syrian refugee children."

Nadine Georges Gholam (not her real name), working for one of the UN agencies, says that lately she feels phlegmatic, even hopeless:

"What has been happening to Lebanon particularly these past five years is really depressing. I used to actively take part in protests to voice my anger and frustration. But now I don't know if they make any difference or change anything at all. There is no functioning government in sight. 300,000 tons of unprocessed trash accumulated in just 8 months. There is sectarian infighting. Regional conflicts... What else? Lebanon can't withstand such pressure, anymore. All is going down the drain, collapsing..."

But worse is yet to come. Recently, Saudi Arabia cancelled a US\$4 billion aid package for Lebanon. It was supposed to finance the massive purchase of modern weapons from France, something urgently needed and totally overdue. That is, if both the West and the KSA are serious about fighting the ISIS.

The KSA "punished" Lebanon for having representatives of Hezbollah in the government, for refusing to support the West's allies in the Arab League (who define Hezbollah as a terrorist group), and for still holding one of Saudi Arabia's princes in custody, after he attempted to smuggle 2 tons of narcotics from Rafic Hariri International Airport, outside Beirut.

The story of the Saudi prince is truly grotesque but 'explosive'. Lebanese authorities found some cocaine on board his private jet, most likely for the personal use of his family and friends. But most importantly there was an industrial quantity of Captagon, which is not some recreational drug, intended for the underground nightclubs of the Gulf in general, nor for the notorious private orgies in Saudi Arabia in particular. It is, as I was told by several local experts, a

“drug that makes one extremely brutal; a drug, which destroys all fear. It is a ‘combat narcotic’, which has been given mainly to the ISIS fighters. It could have been destined for Iraq and the ISIS cells there, but most likely the Saudi Prince was carrying it for the Saudi allies in Yemen. Or both... Or most likely, for both.”

Lebanon obviously “crossed the line”. It refused to play by the script painstakingly prepared by the West and its partners. And now it is being slapped, brutally punished, some even say: “sacrificed”.

Dangerous Crossroads

These are of course the most dangerous times for this tiny but proud nation. Syrian forces, with the great help of Russia, are liberating one Syrian city after another from the ISIS and other terrorist groups supported by Turkey, KSA, Qatar and other Western allies.

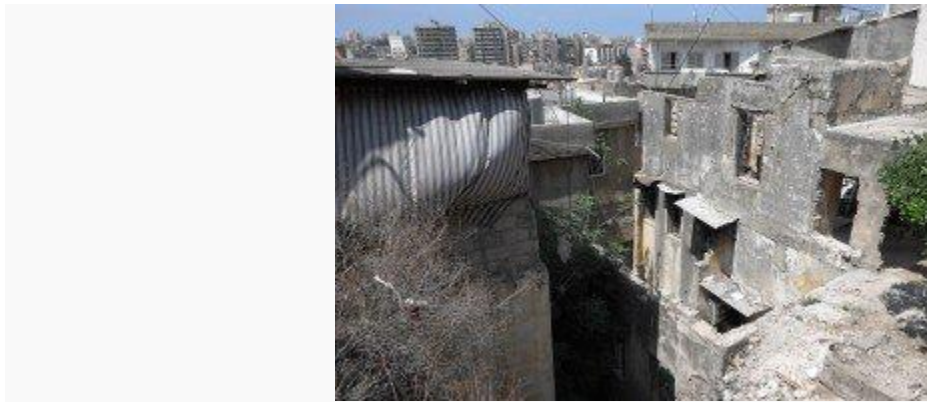


Image: Northern city of Tripoli – soon warzone again

The ISIS may try to move into Iraq, to join its cohorts there, but the Iraqi government is trying to get its act together, and is now ready to fight. It is also talking to Moscow, while studying the great success Russia is having in Syria.

For the ISIS or al Nusrah, a move to the weak and almost bankrupt Lebanon would be the most logical step. And the West, Saudi Arabia and others, are clearly aware of it.

In fact, the ISIS is already there; it has infiltrated virtually all cities and towns of Lebanon, as well as its countryside. Whenever it feels like it, it carries out attacks against the Shi’a, military and other targets. Both the ISIS and al Nusrah do. And the dream of the ISIS is blatant: a caliphate with access to the sea, one that would cover at least the northern part of Lebanon.

If the West and its allies do nothing to prevent these plans, it is because they simply don’t want to.

There are several scenarios how the “fall of Lebanon” could occur. The simplest one is this:

Israel could execute another invasion, or even a “mini-incursion” into Lebanon. It periodically does, anyway. And it keeps threatening, warning that it will again. The Lebanese army is too weak to do anything to defend the country. Hezbollah would throw its forces from the battlefield with the ISIS (in the northeast) down to the south. There they would be tied down for at least several weeks. And that would allow the ISIS to move in, across the border, almost unopposed. Dormant cells – “5th columns” – would be immediately activated. The country could collapse within just a few days.

Now Lebanese leaders should be talking to Teheran and Moscow, immediately, while there is still at least some time left to avert absolute disaster. They should be openly asking for help. There are always wide-open channels with Iran. But instead of hosting a delegation that would try to prevent imminent collapse of Lebanon, Russia had to deal with a recent visit of Saad Hariri, former PM and the leader of “Future Movement”; a man who is openly anti-Hezbollah and, like his (assassinated) father Rafic Hariri, a staunch ally of the KSA, and on top of it, a Saudi Arabian citizen!

‘Coincidentally’, Robert Fisk wrote, sarcastically, about Mr. Hariri, for The Independent on 3 March 2016:

The Sunni Lebanese Future Movement’s leader and former Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, is a Saudi citizen – as was his assassinated ex-prime minister father Rafic – and is now quite taken aback by the willful actions of a nation to which he has always given as much allegiance as he has to Lebanon. The Future Movement, it seems, did not try hard enough to ameliorate Lebanon’s official criticism of Saudi Arabia in the Arab League and should have prevented Hezbollah from destabilizing Yemen and Bahrain – even though there is no physical proof that either Hezbollah or Iran have actually been involved in the Yemeni war or the Shi’a revolt against the Bahraini autarchy, where a Sunni king rules over a Shia majority.

Political and Military Storm

Tiny Lebanon is finding itself in the middle of a whirlwind of a political and military storm that is consuming virtually the entire Middle East and the Gulf.

In the last decades, Lebanon has already suffered immensely. This time, if the West and its allied do not change their minds, it may soon cease to exist altogether. It is becoming obvious that in order to survive, it would have to forge much closer ties with the Syrian government, as well as with Iran, Russia and China.

Would it dare to do it? There is no united front inside Lebanon’s leadership. Pro-Western and pro-Saudi fractions would oppose an alliance with those countries that are defying Western interests.

But time is running out. Just recently, the Syrian city of Palmyra was liberated from the ISIS. Paradoxically, the great Lebanese historic cities of Baalbek and Byblos may fall soon.

