



# The NATIONAL INTEREST

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## [Lebanon Appoints a New Prime Minister, as Anti-Government Protests Continue](#)

Two weeks following the beginning of anti-government protests in Lebanon, Saad Hariri resigned as Prime Minister. Hassan Diab, a former Education Minister, was selected last week as Lebanon's new Prime Minister to break a political deadlock amid mass protests. Diab, a professor at the American University of Beirut, was appointed by President Michel Aoun after a day of consultations with lawmakers in which he gained a simple majority in the 128-member parliament. He has vowed that his government will only consist of independents and experts. Friendly nations, such as France, have expressed that they will not support a heavily-indebted Lebanon before a reform-minded Cabinet is created.

In his first public address, Diab said he would work quickly to form a government in consultations with political parties and representatives of the protest movement. He said he is committed to a reform plan and described the current situation as "critical and sensitive," requiring exceptional efforts and collaboration. "We are facing a national crisis that doesn't allow for the luxury of personal and political battles but needs national unity," Diab said. He told the protesters he hears their "pain."

In Washington D.C., a State Department spokesperson said that U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale had encouraged Lebanese leaders during his two-day visit last week "to put aside partisan interests and support formation of a government committed to and capable of undertaking meaningful, sustained reforms." He is key to delivering 11 billion dollars in international aid which will not be provided until economic and political reforms are implemented. Hale "reaffirmed America's longstanding partnership and enduring commitment to a secure, stable, and prosperous Lebanon," said State Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus.

The protests in Lebanon began as demonstrations by several civil society-affiliated groups within the country, but has since grown into millions of Lebanese and descendants of Lebanese citizens in cities around the world joining Beirut to express their anger over the deep economic crisis and rampant state corruption plaguing the country. A decision to impose a tax on all WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger calls appeared to be the trigger for many Lebanese citizens, who felt that the government's proposed solutions to the crisis were inefficient.

Some of the ongoing problems in Lebanon include a longstanding environmental crisis, water and electricity shortages, crumbling infrastructure and lack of state services, and extremely unequal distribution of riches and economic depletion. The leaderless protests, initialized two months ago, are calling for a government made up of specialists that can work on dealing with the economic crisis. The protests have generally been peaceful, but recently turned violent with frequent clashes between security forces and protesters.