

### [Armed Violence Breaks Out in Beirut as Tensions Escalate Over the Port Explosion Probe](#)

Today, deadly clashes and gunfire have erupted in the Lebanese capital city of Beirut, as tensions escalate over the ongoing port explosion probe. The violence comes after protests were organized by the Lebanese group Hezbollah and its allies against the lead judge investigating last year's massive blast at the Port of Beirut. Witnesses claim that the problem started when demonstrators came under fire from gunmen belonging to the Lebanese Forces headed by Samir Geagea – who is supported financially and politically by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – as analysts and regional experts have long lamented the destabilizing degree of foreign interference in Lebanon. The location of the outbreak of gunfire took place near the birthplace of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, and has also therefore raised concern regarding the potential of further and prolonged violence. To date, 6 people have been killed with at least a further 30 more injured, as the Lebanese military has been deployed into the streets of Beirut to try and quell the situation.

Tensions in Lebanon have remained high since the August 2020 Beirut port explosion. Hezbollah, the Amal movement, and various Shiite political groups have called for judge Tarek Bitar to be removed from the probe, as they try to cite what they claim is a one-sided and unfair investigation disproportionately targeting Shiite political and social figures. On the other hand, other groups have expressed support for Bitar and his investigation, hoping that it will bring some justice for the families that were devastated by the disturbing port explosion last year. For her part, the United States Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland has voiced the need for the trial into the port explosion to continue uninterrupted as well, and the outbreak of violence today actually took place while Nuland was in the country meeting with Lebanese officials.

The current judge overseeing the port explosion investigation, Tarek Bitar, is the second to do so after his predecessor was removed over legal challenges. The probe centers around the detonation of tons of aluminum nitrate that was improperly stored at the port. Now, Hezbollah has claimed Bitar has targeted them unfairly by singling out politicians aligned with the group, despite the fact that no Hezbollah leaders have actually been charged thus far. The controversy over the probe and the clashes that have broken out today highlight the tensions within the Lebanese political environment. In recent years, the country's economy has inched closer to deep and severe economic collapse. In fact, the World Bank has warned that a potential looming economic collapse could be one of the worst since the mid-1800s. Ultimately, this economic crisis has only further led to hostilities among the various political factions in Lebanon.

As of now, gunfire has echoed in the Lebanese capital city of Beirut for several hours with ambulances and medical personnel rushing to treat the casualties. Bullets have also penetrated into residential buildings in the surrounding areas, and schools were on lockdown in the midst of the violence. Incumbent Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati has called for an end to the hostilities, while armed forces have tried to bring a semblance of calm to the streets. While it appears that some order has been established, the possibility of further devolvement still exists, and it remains to be seen how circumstances unfold in the coming hours and days.